CARTER
AND
OTHER PEOPLE

DON MARQUIS

BOOKS BY DON MARQUIS

PREFACES
HERMIONE
CARTER
NOAH AN' JONAH AN'
CAP'N JOHN SMITH

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON

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DON MARQUIS

AUTHOR OF "HERMIONE," "PREFACES," "NOAH AN' JONAH AN' CAP'N JOHN SMITH," ETC.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
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Replacement

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FOREWORD

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the editors of several magazines for permission to reprint the following stories in book form. "Carter" was originally published in *Harpers Monthly Magazine* under the title "The Mulatto." "Death and Old Man Murtrie" was printed in *The New Republic;* others were first brought out in *Everybody's Magazine, Short Stories, Putnam's Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post.* "The Penitent" was originally printed in *The Pictorial Review,* with the title "The Healer and the Penitent." The plot of this story is taken from two poems, one by Browning and one by Owen Meredith. Happening to read these two poems, one after the other, I was struck by the fact that Owen Meredith had unwittingly written what was in effect a continuation of a situation invented by Browning; the plot of the one poem, telescoped into the plot of the other, made in effect a complete short story. I pasted the two situations together, so to speak, inventing an ending of my own, and had a short story which neither Browning nor Owen Meredith could claim as his—and which I scarcely have the nerve to claim as mine. And yet this story, taken piecemeal from the two poets, gave me more trouble than anything else I ever tried to write; it was all there, apparently; but to

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transpose the story into a modern American setting was a difficult job. It is my only essay in conscious plagiarism—I hate to call it plagiarism, but what else could one call it?—and I give you my word that it is easier to invent than to pragiarize. The one-act play, "Words and Thoughts," was written ten years ago—in 1911—and has been offered to every theatrical manager in America, and refused by them all. I still believe in it as a thing that could be acted with effect, and I am determined to get it read, even if I cannot get it produced. The fact that it has been going the rounds of theatrical managers for ten years is no indication that it has ever been read.

DON MARQUIS

NEW YORK

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I.—Carter

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

I.—Carter

CARTER was not exactly a negro, but he was a "nigger." Seven drops of his blood out of every eight were Caucasian. The eighth, being African, classified him. The white part of him despised and pitied the black part. The black part hated the white part. Consequently, wherever Carter went he carried his own hell along inside of him.

Carter began to learn that he was a nigger very early in life. Nigger children are not left long in doubt anywhere, and especially in the South. Carter first saw the light—and the shadows—of day in Atlanta. The color line itself, about which one hears so much talk, seemed to run along one end of the alley in which he was born. It was an alley with a gutter and a great deal of mud in it. At the corner, where it gave into a little narrow street not much better than an alley itself, the mud was the thickest, deepest, and best adapted to sculptural purposes. But in the little street lived a number of white families. They were most of them mill hands, and a numerous spawn of skinny children, little "crackers," with faces white and sad even from babyhood, disputed the mud with the

nigger children. Nigger babies of five, four, three, and even two, understood quite well that this most desirable mud, even though it was in the nigger alley, was claimed by the white babies as *their* mud. It was in every way a more attractive sort of mud than any in the little street proper; and juvenile race riots were of almost hourly occurrence—skirmishes in which the very dogs took part. For the dogs grasped the situation as clearly as did the children; a "nigger" dog, even though he may have started in life as a white man's dog, soon gets a certain look about him.

So there was no chance for Carter to escape the knowledge that he was a nigger. But it was with a thrill that he perceived in his youthful excursions from the home alley, that he was sometimes mistaken for a white child. He was so white in color that one could not tell he was a nigger at a casual glance.

As he grew up, he made another discovery that elated and embittered him still more. He found out who his father was—or rather, who his father had been, since he never saw that gentleman. The white blood in Carter's veins was no common ichor. Because white people seldom speak of these things it does not follow that they are not known pretty generally among the negroes. They are, in fact, discussed.

Carter went to school; he made the further discovery that he had brains—"white man's brains" is the way he put it to himself. Given the oppor-

tunity, he told himself, he could go as far as the average white man—perhaps further than the average. The white man's standard, nigger though he was, was still the standard by which he must measure himself. But the opportunity! Even as the youth prepared himself for it he perceived, hopelessly, that it would be denied him.

As he matured he began to feel a strange, secret pride in that white family whose blood he shared. He familiarized himself with its genealogy. There is many a courtier who cannot trace his ancestry as far back as Carter could. One of his forebears had signed Magna Charta; several had fought in the Revolutionary War. There had been a United States Senator in the family, and a Confederate General. At times, feeling the vigorous impulse of hereditary instinct and ambitions, Carter looked upon himself as all white man, but never for long, nor to any purpose. The consciousness of his negro blood pulled him down again.

But, as he grew up, he ceased to herd with black negroes; he scorned them. He crept about the world cursing it and himself—an unfortunate and bitter creature that had no place; unfortunate and bitter, cursed with an intellect, denied that mitigation that might have come with a full share of the negro jovialty of disposition, forever unreconciled.

There was one member of that white family from which he drew so much of his blood whom Carter particularly admired. Willoughby How-

ard was about Carter's own age, and he was Carter's half-brother. Howard did not distinguish Carter from any other mulatto; probably did not know of his existence. But as Howard reached manhood, and, through virtue of his wealth and standing and parts, began to attain an excellent place in the world, his rise was watched by Carter with a strange intensity of emotion. Carter in some occult way identified himself with the career of Willoughby Howard—sometimes he almost worshiped Willoughby Howard, and then he hated him; he envied him and raged over him with the same breath.

But mostly, as the isolation of his own condition ate into his soul, he raged over himself; he pitied himself; he hated himself. Out of the turmoil of his spirit arose the one despairing cry, Oh, to be white, white, *white!*

Many a night he lay awake until daybreak, measuring the slow minutes with the ceaseless iteration of that useless prayer: Only to be white! O God, for one *little year of being white!*

Fruitless hours of prayers and curses!

Carter went North. He went to New York. But the North, which affects to promise so much to the negro, in a large, loose, general way, does not perform in the same degree. There was only one thing which Carter would have thanked any one for performing; it was the one thing that could never be performed—he wanted to be made

white. Sometimes, indeed, from the depths of his despair, he cried out that he wanted to be altogether black; but in his soul he did not really want that.

Nevertheless, at several different periods he yielded to temptation and "went over to the whites." In the South he could not have done this without discovery, in spite of the color of his skin. But in the Northern cities, with their enormous numbers of aliens, all more or less strange to the American eye, Carter found no great difficulty in passing as white. He "looked a little foreign" to the casual glance; that was all.

But if there was no great difficulty in it, there was no great satisfaction in it, either. In fact, it only made him the more bitter. Others might think him a white man, but he knew that he was a nigger.

The incident which sent him back South, resolved to be a nigger, and to live and die among the niggers, might not have affected another in his condition just as it did Carter. But to him it showed conclusively that his destiny was not a matter of environment so much as a question of himself.

He fell in love. The girl was a waitress in a cheap restaurant near the barber shop where Carter worked. She was herself a product of the East Side, struggling upward from the slums; partly Italian, with some Oriental strain in her that had given the least perceptible obliqueness to

her eyes—one of those rare hybrid products which give the thinker pause and make him wonder what the word "American" will signify a century from now; a creature with very red lips and very black eyebrows; she seemed to know more than she really did; she had a kind of naïve charm, a sort of allurement, without actual beauty; and her name had been Anglicized into Mary.

And she loved Carter. This being, doomed from the cradle to despair, had his moment of romance. But even in his intoxication there was no hope; his elation was embittered and perplexed. He was tempted not to tell the girl that he was a nigger. But if he married her, and did not tell her, perhaps the first child would ~~tell her~~. It might look more of a nigger than he did.

But if he told her, would she marry a nigger? He decided he would tell her. Perhaps his conscience had less to do with this decision than the fatalism of his temperament.

So he made his revelation one Sunday evening, as they walked along the boardwalk from Coney Island to Brighton. To him, it was a tremendous moment. For days he had been revolving in his mind the phrases he would use; he had been rehearsing his plea; in his imagination he saw something spectacular, something histrionic, in his confession.

"Mary," he said, as they sat down on a bench on the beach, "there is something I think I ought to tell you before we get married."

The girl turned toward him her big, sleepy, dark eyes, which always seemed to see and understand so much more than they really did, and looked away again.

"I ought to tell you," he said—and as he said it, staring out to sea, he was so imposed upon by the importance of the moment to himself that he almost felt as if the sea listened and the waves paused—"I ought to tell you that I have negro blood in my veins."

She was silent. There was a moment before he dared look at her; he could not bear to read his doom in her eyes. But finally he did muster up courage enough to turn his head.

The girl was placidly chewing gum and gazing at an excursion vessel that was making a landing at one of the piers.

He thought she had not heard. "Mary," he repeated, "I have negro blood in my veins."

"Uh-huh," said she. "I gotcha the first time, Steve! Say, I wonder if we couldn't take the boat back to town? Huh? Whatcha say?"

He looked at her almost incredulous. She had understood, and yet she had not shrunk away from him! He examined her with a new interest; his personal drama, in which she, perforce, must share, seemed to have made no impression upon her whatsoever.

"Do you mean," he said, hesitatingly, "that it will—that it won't make any difference to you?

That you can marry me, that you *will* marry me, in spite of—of—in spite of what I am?"

"Gee! but ain't you the solemn one!" said the girl, taking hold of her gum and "stringing" it out from her lips. "Whatcha s'pose I care for a little thing like that?"

He had looked for a sort of dramatic "situation"; and, behold, there was none! There was none simply because the girl had no vantage point from which to look at his life and hers. He had negro blood in his veins—and she simply did not care one way or the other!

He felt no elation, no exultation; he believed that she *should* have cared; whether her love was great enough to pardon that in him or not, she should have felt it as a thing that *needed* pardon.

As he stared at the girl, and she continued to chew her gum, he swiftly and subtly revised his estimate of her; and in his new appraisement there was more than a tinge of disgust. And for a moment he became altogether a white man in his judgment of the thing that was happening; he looked at the situation as a patrician of the South might have looked at it; the seven eighths of his blood which was white spoke:

"By God!" he said, suddenly leaping to his feet and flinging aside the startled hand which the girl put out toward him, "I can't have anything to do with a woman who'd marry a nigger!"

So Carter went back to Atlanta. And, curi-

ously enough, he stepped from the train almost into the midst of a strange and terrible conflict of which the struggle in his individual breast was, in a sense, the type and the symbol.

It was a Saturday night in September, an evening on which there began a memorable and sanguinary massacre of negroes; an event which has been variously explained and analyzed, but of which, perhaps, the underlying causes will never be completely understood.

There was riot in the streets, a whirlwind of passion which lashed the town and lifted up the trivial souls of men and spun them round and round, and passed and left the stains of blood behind. White men were making innocent negroes suffer for the brutal crimes of guilty negroes. It had been a hot summer; scarcely a day had passed during July and August without bringing to the newspapers from somewhere in Georgia a report of a negro assault upon some white woman. A blind, undiscriminating anger against the whole negro race had been growing and growing. And when, on that Saturday afternoon, the newspapers reported four more crimes, in rapid succession, all in or near Atlanta, the cumulative rage burst into a storm.

There was no danger for Carter in the streets; more than a hasty glance was necessary to spy out his negro taint. He stood in a doorway, in the heart of the business district of the town, and watched the wild work that went on in a large,

irregular plaza, where five streets come together and all the car lines in the place converge. From this roughly triangular plaza leads Decatur Street, at one time notorious throughout the South for its negro dives and gambling-dens.

Now and then Carter could hear the crack of a pistol, close at hand or far away; and again some fleeing negro would start from a place of temporary concealment, at the approach of a mob that beat its way along a street, and make a wild dash for safety, as a rabbit startled from the sedge-grass scurries to the brush. There was not one mob, but several; the different bands united, split up, and reunited, as the shifting winds of madness blew. The plaza, with arc lights all about it, was the brilliantly illuminated stage on which more than one scene of that disgusting melodrama was played out; from some dim hell of gloom and clamor to the north or east would rush a shouting group that whirled and swayed beneath the lights, dancing like flecks of soot in their brightness, to disappear in the gloom again, shouting, cursing, and gesticulating, down one of the thoroughfares to the west or south. And to Carter, in whose heart there waxed a fearful turmoil of emotions, even as the two races clashed along the echoing streets, there was a strange element of unreality about it all; or, rather, the night was dreadful with that superior reality which makes so much more vivid than waking life the intense experience of dreams. Carter thrilled; he shook; he was

torn with terror and pity and horror and hatred.

No white man felt all that Carter felt that night; nor yet any negro. For he was both, and he was neither; and he beheld that conflict which was forever active in his own nature dramatized by fate and staged with a thousand actors in the lighted proscenium at his feet.

This thought struck Carter himself, and he turned toward another man who had paused in the doorway, with no clear intention, but perhaps with the vague impulse of addressing him, as a point of solid contact and relief from the sense of hurrying nightmare that possessed both the streets and his own spirit.

Startled, he saw that the other man was Willoughby Howard. Carter hesitated, and then advanced a step. But whatever he had to say was interrupted by a crowd that swept past them from Decatur Street in pursuit of a panting negro. The fleeing colored man was struck a dozen times; he fell at the street corner near them, and the mob surged on again into the darkness beyond, already in full chase of another quarry—all but one man, who left the mob and ran back as if to assure himself that the prostrate negro was really dead.

This was a short man, a very short man, a dwarf with a big head too heavy for him, and little bandy legs—legs so inadequate that he wabbled like an overfed poodle when he ran. Carter had seen him twice before that night, dodging in and out among the feet of the rioters like an excited cur, stumbling,

falling, trodden upon; a being with bloodshot eyes and matted hair, hoarse voice and menacing fist, drunken and staggering with blood lust; the very Gnome of Riot himself come up from some foul cave and howling in the streets. "Kill them! Kill them!" he would cry, and then shake with cackling laughter. But he was only valiant when there was no danger. As he approached the negro who lay upon the ground, and bent over him, Willoughby Howard stepped down from the doorway and aimed a blow at the creature with a cane. The blow missed, but the dwarf ran shrieking down Decatur Street.

Howard bent over the negro. The negro stirred; he was not dead. Howard turned toward Carter and said:

"He's alive! Help me get him out of the street."

Together they lifted the wounded man, moving him toward the curbstone. He groaned and twisted, and they laid him down. Howard poured whisky into him from a pocket flask, and a little later he managed to struggle to a sitting posture on the curb, looking up at them with dazed eyes and a bloody face.

Howard took his slow gaze from the negro and covered his face with his hands.

Carter watched him.

Of all men in the world this was the one whom Carter most honored and most loved—honored and loved, while he envied; he was the only man,

perhaps, that could have touched Carter through his crust of bitterness. Carter listened with strained attention for what Howard would say, as if with some premonition that the words would be the cue for the most vital action of his life.

"My God! ~~My God~~!" said Willoughby Howard, "will this thing never stop?" And then he straightened himself and turned toward the shadow into which Carter had retired, and there was the glow and glory of a large idea on his face; the thought of a line of men never lacking, when once aroused, in the courage to do and die for a principle or a human need. "There is one way," he cried, stretching out his hands impulsively to Carter, and not knowing to whom or to what manner of man he spoke—"there is one way to make them pause and think! If two of us white men of the better class offer our lives for these poor devils—die in their defense!—the mob will halt; the crowd will think; we can end it! Will you do it, with me? Will you do it?"

Two of us white men of the better class! Willoughby Howard had taken him for a white man! It was like an accolade. A light blazed through the haunted caverns of his soul; he swelled with a vast exultation.

Willoughby Howard had taken him for a white man! Then, by God, he would be one! Since he was nothing in this life, he could at least die—and in his death he would be a white man! Nay, more: —he would die shoulder to shoulder with one of

that family whose blood he shared. He would show that he, too, could shed that blood for an idea or a principle! For humanity! At the thought he could feel it singing in his veins. Oh, to be white, white, white! The dreams and the despairs of all his miserable and hampered life passed before him in a whirl, and now the cry was answered!

"Yes," he said, lifting his head, and rising at that instant into a larger thing than he had ever been, "I will stand by you. I will die with you." And under his breath he added—"my brother."

They had not long to wait. In the confused horror of that night things happened quickly. Even as Carter spoke the wounded negro struggled to his feet with a scarce articulate cry of alarm, for around the corner swept a mob, and the dwarf with matted hair was in the lead. He had come back with help to make sure of his job.

With the negro cowering behind them, the white man and the mulatto stepped forth to face the mob. Their attitude made their intention obvious.

"Don't be a damned fool, Willoughby Howard," said a voice from the crowd, "or you may get hurt yourself." And with the words there was a rush, and the three were in the midst of the clamoring madness, the mob dragging the negro from his two defenders.

"Be careful—don't hurt Willoughby Howard!" said the same voice again. Willoughby turned, and, recognizing the speaker as an acquaintance,

with a sudden access of scorn and fury and disgust, struck him across the mouth. The next moment his arms were pinioned, and he was lifted and flung away from the negro he had been fighting to protect by half a dozen men.

"You fools! You fools!" he raged, struggling toward the center of the crowd again, "you're killing a white man there. An innocent white man—— Do you stop at nothing? You're killing a *white man,* I say!"

"White man?" said the person whom he had struck, and who appeared to bear him little resentment for the blow. "Who's a white man? Not Jerry Carter here! *He* wasn't any white man. I've known him since he was a kid—he was just one of those yaller niggers."

And Carter heard it as he died.

Good
Perfect

II.—Old Man Murtrie

II.—Old Man Murtrie

Old Man Murtrie never got any fresh air at all, except on Sundays on his way to and from church. He lived, slept, cooked and ate back of the prescription case in his little dismal drug store in one of the most depressing quarters of Brooklyn. The store was dimly lighted by gas and it was always damp and suggested a tomb. Drifting feebly about in the pale and cold and faintly greenish radiance reflected from bottles and show cases, Old Man Murtrie with his bloodless face and dead white hair and wisps of whisker was like a ghost that has not managed to get free from the neighborhood of a sepulcher where its body lies disintegrating.

People said that Old Man Murtrie was nearly a hundred years old, but this was not true; he was only getting along towards ninety. The neighborhood, however, seemed a little impatient with him for not dying. Some persons suggested that perhaps he really had been dead for a long time, and did not know it. If so, they thought, it might be kind to tell him about it.

But Old Man Murtrie was not dead, any more than he was alive. And Death himself, who has

his moments of impatience, began to get worried about Old Man Murtrie. It was time, Death thought, that he was dead, since he looked so dead; and Death had said so, both to God and to the Devil.

"But I don't want to garner him, naturally," Death would say, "till I know which one of you is to have him. He's got to go somewhere, you know."

God and Death and the Devil used to sit on the prescription counter in a row, now and then, and watch Old Man Murtrie as he slept in his humble little cot back there, and discuss him.

God would look at Old Man Murtrie's pale little Adam's Apple sticking up in the faint gas-light, and moving as he snored—moving feebly, for even his snores were feeble—and say, with a certain distaste:

"I don't want him. He can't get into Heaven."

And the Devil would look at his large, weak, characterless nose;—a nose so big that it might have suggested force on any one but Old Man Murtrie—and think what a sham it was, and how effectually all its contemptible effort to be a real nose was exposed in Old Man Murtrie's sleep. And the Devil would say:

"I don't want him. He can't get into Hell."

And then Death would say, querulously: "But he can't go on living forever. My reputation is suffering."

"You should take him," the Devil would say to

God. "He goes to church on Sunday, and he is the most meek and pious and humble and prayerful person in all Brooklyn, and perhaps in all the world."

"But he takes drugs," God would say. "You should take him, because he is a drug fiend."

"He takes drugs," the Devil would admit, "but that doesn't make him a *fiend.* You have to do something besides take drugs to be a fiend. You will permit me to have my own notions, I am sure, on what constitutes a fiend."

"You ought to forgive him the drugs for the sake of his piety," the Devil would say. "And taking drugs is his only vice. He doesn't drink, or smoke tobacco, or use profane language, or gamble. And he doesn't run after women."

"You ought to forgive him the piety for the sake of the drugs," God would tell the Devil.

"I never saw such a pair as you two," Death would say querulously. "Quibble, quibble, quibble! —while Old Man Murtrie goes on and on living! He's lived so long that he is affecting death rates and insurance tables, all by himself, and you know what that does to my reputation."

And Death would stoop over and run his finger caressingly across Old Man Murtrie's throat, as the Old Man slept. Whereupon Old Man Murtrie would roll over on his back and moan in his sleep and gurgle.

"He has wanted to be a cheat all his life," God would say to the Devil. "He has always had the

impulse to give short weight and substitute inferior drugs in his prescriptions and overcharge children who were sent on errands to his store. If that isn't sin I don't know what sin is. You should take him."

"I admit he has had those impulses," the Devil would say to God. "But he has never yielded to them. In my opinion having those impulses and conquering them makes him a great deal more virtuous than if he'd never had 'em. No one who is as virtuous as all that can get into Hell."

"I never saw such a pair," Death would grumble. "Can't you agree with each other about anything?"

"He didn't abstain from his vices because of any courage," God would say. "He abstained simply because he was afraid. It wasn't virtue in him; it was cowardice."

"The fear of the Lord," murmured the Devil, dreamily, "is the beginning of all wisdom."

"But not necessarily the end of it," God would remark.

"Argue, argue, argue," Death would say, "and here's Old Man Murtrie still alive! I'm criticized about the way I do my work, but no one has any idea of the vacillation and inefficiency I have to contend with! I never saw such a pair as you two to vacillate!"

Sometimes Old Man Murtrie would wake up and turn over on his couch and see God and Death and the Devil sitting in a row on the prescription counter, looking at him. But he always persuaded

himself that it was a sort of dream, induced by the "medicine" he took; and he would take another dose of his "medicine" and go back to sleep again. He never spoke to them when he waked, but just lay on his cot and stared at them; and if they spoke to him he would pretend to himself that they had not spoken. For it was absurd to think that God and Death and the Devil could really be sitting there, in the dim greenish gaslight, among all the faintly radiant bottles, talking to each other and looking at him; and so Old Man Murtrie would not believe it.

When he first began taking his "medicine" Old Man Murtrie took it in the form of a certain patent preparation which was full of opium. He wanted the opium more and more after he started, but he pretended to himself that he did not know there was much opium in that medicine. Then, when a federal law banished that kind of medicine from the markets, he took to making it for his own use. He would not take opium outright, for that would be to acknowledge to himself that he was an opium eater; he thought eating opium was a sin, and he thought of himself as sinless. But to make the medicine with the exact formula that its manufacturers had used, before they had been compelled to shut up shop, and use it, did not seem to him to be the same thing at all as being an opium eater. And yet, after the law was passed, abolishing the medicine, he would not sell to any one else what he made for himself; his conscience

would not allow him to do so. Therefore, he must have known that he was eating opium at the same time he tried to fool himself about it.

God and the Devil used to discuss the ethics of this attitude towards the "medicine," and Old Man Murtrie would sometimes pretend to be asleep and would listen to them.

"He knows it is opium all right," God would say. "He is just lying to himself about it. He ought to go to Hell. No one that lies to himself that way can get into Heaven."

"He's pretending for the sake of society in general and for the sake of religion," the Devil would say. "If he admitted to himself that it was opium and if he let the world know that he took opium, it might bring discredit on the church that he loves so well. He might become a stumbling block to others who are seeking salvation, and who seek it through the church. He is willing to sacrifice himself so as not to hamper others in their religious life. For my part, I think it is highly honorable of him, and highly virtuous. No person as moral as that in his instincts can get into Hell."

"Talk, talk, talk!" Death would say. "The trouble with you two is that neither one of you wants Old Man Murtrie around where you will have to look at him through all eternity, and each of you is trying to put it on moral grounds."

And Old Man Murtrie kept on living and praying and being pious and wanting to be bad and not daring to and taking his medicine and being

generally as ineffectual in the world either for good or evil as a butterfly in a hurricane.

But things took a turn. There was a faded-looking blonde woman with stringy hair by the name of Mable who assisted Old Man Murtrie in the store, keeping his books and waiting on customers, and so forth. She was unmarried, and one day she announced to him that she was going to have a child.

Old Man Murtrie had often looked at her with a recollection, a dim and faint remembrance, of the lusts of his youth and of his middle age. In his youth and middle age he had lusted after many women, but he had never let any of them know it, because he was afraid, and he had called his fears virtue, and had really believed that he was virtuous.

"Whom do you suspect?" asked Old Man Murtrie, leering at Mable like a wraith blown down the ages from the dead adulteries of ruined Babylon.

"Who?" cried Mable, an unlessoned person, but with a cruel, instinctive humor. "Who but you!"

She had expected Old Man Murtrie to be outraged at her ridiculous joke, and, because she was unhappy herself, had anticipated enjoying his astounded protests. But it was she who was astounded. Old Man Murtrie's face was blank and his eyes were big for a moment, and then he chuckled; a queer little cackling chuckle. And when she

went out he opened the door for her and cocked his head and cackled again.

It gave Mable an idea. She reflected that he took so much opium that he might possibly be led to believe the incredible, and she might get some money out of him. So the next evening she brought her mother and her brother to the store and accused him.

Old Man Murtrie chuckled and . . . *and admitted it!* Whether he believed that it could be true or not, Mable and her people were unable to determine. But they made the tactical error of giving him his choice between marriage and money, and he chose matrimony.

And then Old Man Murtrie was suddenly seized with a mania for confession. God and Death and the Devil used to listen to him nights, and they wondered over him, and began to change their minds about him, a little. He confessed to the officials of his church. He confessed to all the people whom he knew. He insisted on making a confession, a public confession, in the church itself and asking for the prayers of the preacher and congregation for his sin, and telling them that he was going to atone by matrimony, and asking for a blessing on the wedding.

And one night, full of opium, while he was babbling about it in his sleep, God and Death and the Devil sat on the prescription counter again and looked at him and listened to his ravings and speculated.

"I'm going to have him," said the Devil. "Any one who displays such conspicuous bad taste that he goes around confessing that he has ruined a woman ought to go to Hell."

"You don't want him for that reason," said God. "And you know you don't. You want him because you admire the idea of adultery, and think that now he is worthy of a place in Hell. You are rather entertained by Old Man Murtrie, and want him around now."

"Well," said the Devil, "suppose I admit that is true! Have you any counter claim?"

"Yes," said God. "I am going to take Old Man Murtrie into Heaven. He knows he is not the father of the child that is going to be born, but he has deliberately assumed the responsibility lest it be born fatherless, and I think that is a noble act."

"Rubbish!" said the Devil. "That isn't the reason you want him. You want him because of the paternal instinct he displays. It flatters you!"

"Well," said God, "why not? The paternal instinct is another name for the great creative force of the universe. I have been known by many names in many countries . . . they called me Osiris, the All-Father, in Egypt, and they called me Jehovah in Palestine, and they called me Zeus and Brahm . . . but always they recognized me as the Father. And this instinct for fatherliness appeals to me. Old Man Murtrie shall come to Heaven."

"Such a pair as you two," said Death, gloomily, "I never did see! Discuss and discuss, but never get anywhere! And all the time Old Man Murtrie goes on living."

And then Death added:

"Why not settle this matter once and for all, right now? Why not wake Old Man Murtrie up and let him decide?"

"Decide?" asked the Devil.

"Yes,—whether he wants to go to Hell or to Heaven."

"I imagine," said God, "that if we do that there can be no question as to which place he would rather go to."

"Oh, I don't know," said the Devil. "Some people come to Hell quite willingly. I've been to Heaven myself, you know, and I can quite understand why. Are you afraid to have Old Man Murtrie make the choice?"

"Wake him up, Death, wake him up," said God. "It's unusual to allow people to know that they are making their own decision—though all of them, in a sense, do make it—but wake him up, Death, and we'll see."

So Death prodded Old Man Murtrie in the ribs, and they asked him. For a long time he thought it was only opium, but when he finally understood that it was really God and Death and the Devil who were there, and that it was really they who had often been there before, he was very much

frightened. He was so frightened he couldn't choose.

"I'll leave it to you, I'll leave it to you," said Old Man Murtrie. "Who am I that I should set myself up to decide?"

"Well," said God, getting a little angry, perhaps, "if you don't want to go to Heaven, Murtrie, you don't have to. But you've been praying to go to Heaven, and all that sort of thing, for seventy or eighty years, and I naturally thought you were in earnest. But I'm through with you . . . you can go to Hell."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" moaned Old Man Murtrie.

"No," said the Devil, "I've changed my mind, too. My distaste for Murtrie has returned to me. I don't want him around. I won't have him in Hell."

"See here, now!" cried Death. "You two are starting it all over again. I won't have it, so I won't! You aren't fair to Murtrie, and you aren't fair to me! This matter has got to be settled, and settled to-night!"

"Well, then," said God, "settle it. I've ceased to care one way or another."

"I will not," said Death, "I know my job, and I stick to my job. One of you two has got to settle it."

"Toss a coin," suggested the Devil, indifferently.

Death looked around for one.

"There's a qu-qu-quarter in m-m-my t-t-trousers' p-p-pocket," stammered Old Man Murtrie, and

then stuck his head under the bedclothes and shivered as if he had the ague.

Death picked up Murtrie's poor little weazened trousers from the floor at the foot of the cot, where they lay sprawled untidily, and shook them till the quarter dropped out.

He picked it up.

"Heads, he goes to Heaven. Tails, he goes to Hell," said Death, and tossed the coin to the ceiling. Murtrie heard it hit the ceiling, and started. He heard it hit the floor, and bounce, and jingle and spin and roll and come to rest. And he thrust his head deeper under the covers and lay there quaking. He did not dare look.

"Look at it, Murtrie," said Death.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" groaned Murtrie, shaking the cot.

But Death reached over and caught him by the neck and turned his face so that he could not help seeing. And Old Man Murtrie looked and saw that the coin had fallen with the side up that sent him to——

But, really, why should I tell you? Go and worry about your own soul, and let Old Man Murtrie's alone.

III.—Never Say Die

III.—Never Say Die

THERE seemed nothing left but suicide.

But how? In what manner? By what method? Mr. Gooley lay on his bed and thought—or tried to think. The pain in his head, which had been there ever since the day after he had last eaten, prevented easy and coherent thought.

It had been three days ago that the pain left his stomach and went into his head. Hunger had become a cerebral thing, he told himself. His body had felt hunger so long that it refused to feel it any longer; it had shifted the burden to his brain.

"It has passed the buck to my mind, my stomach has," murmured Mr. Gooley feebly. And the mind, less by the process of coherent and connected thought than by a sudden impulsive pounce, had grasped the idea of suicide.

"Not with a knife," considered Mr. Gooley. He had no knife. He had no money to buy a knife. He had no strength to go down the three flights of stairs in the cheap Brooklyn lodging house where he lay, and borrow a knife from the landlady who came and went vaguely in the nether regions, dim and damp and dismal.

"Not with a knife," repeated Mr. Gooley. And a large cockroach, which had been crawling along the footpiece of the old-fashioned wooden bed, stopped crawling at the words as if it understood, and turned about and looked at him.

Mr. Gooley wondered painfully, for it was a pain even to wonder about anything, why this cockroach should remind him of somebody who was somehow connected with a knife, and not unpleasantly connected with a knife. The cockroach stood up on the hindmost pair of his six legs, and seemed to put his head on one side and motion with his front legs at Mr. Gooley.

"I get you," said Mr. Gooley, conscious that his mind was wandering from the point, and willing to let it wander. "I know who you are! You were Old Man Archibald Hammil, the hardware merchant back in Mapletown, where I was a kid, before you dried up and turned into a cockroach."

And Mr. Gooley wept a few weak tears. For old Archibald Hammil, the village hardware merchant, had sold him the first knife he had ever owned. His father had taken him into Hammil's store to buy it on his seventh birthday, for a present, and it had had a buckhorn handle and two blades. Again he saw Old Man Hammil in his dingy brown clothes, looking at him, with his head on one side, as this cockroach was doing. Again he felt his father pat him on the head, and heard him say always to remember to whittle *away* from

himself, never *toward* himself. And he saw himself, shy and flushed and eager, a freckle-faced boy as good and as bad as most boys, looking up at his father and wriggling and wanting to thank him, and not knowing how. That was nearly forty years ago—and here he was, a failure and starving and——

Why had he wanted a knife? Yes, he remembered now! To kill himself with.

"It's none of your damned business, Old Man Hammil," he said to the cockroach, which was crawling back and forth on the footboard, and pausing every now and then to look at him with disapproval.

Old Man Hammil had had ropes in his store, too, and guns and pistols, he remembered. He hadn't thought of Old Man Hammil's store in many years; but now he saw it, and the village street outside it, and the place where the stores left off on the street and the residences began, and berry bushes, and orchards, and clover in the grass —the random bloom, the little creek that bounded the town, and beyond the creek the open country with its waving fields of oats and rye and corn. His head hurt him worse. He would go right back into Old Man Hammil's store and get a rope or a gun and end that pain.

But *that* was foolish, too. There wasn't any store. There was only Old Man Hammil here, shrunk to the size of a cockroach, in his rusty brown suit, looking at him from the footboard of

the bed and telling him in pantomime not to kill himself.

"I will too!" cried Mr. Gooley to Old Man Hammil. And he repeated, "It's none of *your* damned business!"

But how? Not with a knife. He had none. Not with a gun. He had none. Not with a rope. He had none. He thought of his suspenders. But they would never hold him.

"Too weak, even for me," muttered Mr. Gooley. "I have shrunk so I don't weigh much more than Old Man Hammil there, but even at that those suspenders would never do the business."

How did people kill themselves? He must squeeze his head till the pain let up a little, so he could think. Poison! That was it—yes, poison! And then he cackled out a small, dry, throaty laugh, his Adam's apple fluttering in his weazened throat under his sandy beard. Poison! He *hadn't* any poison. He hadn't any money with which to buy poison.

And then began a long, broken and miserable debate within himself. If he had money enough with which to buy poison, would he go and buy poison? Or go and buy a bowl of soup? It was some moments before Mr. Gooley decided.

"I'd be game," he said. "I'd buy the soup. I'd give myself that one more chance. I must remember while I'm killing myself, that I'm not killing myself because I *want* to. I'm just doing it be-

cause I've *got* to. I'm not romantic. I'm just all in. It's the end; that's all."

Old Man Hammil, on the footboard of the bed, permitted himself a series of gestures which Mr. Gooley construed as applause of this resolution. They angered Mr. Gooley, those gestures.

"You shut up!" he told the cockroach, although that insect had not spoken, but only made signs. "This is none of your damned business, Old Man Hammil!"

Old Man Hammil, he remembered, had always been a meddlesome old party—one of the village gossips, in fact. And that set him to thinking of Mapletown again.

The mill pond near the schoolhouse would soon be freezing over, and the boys would be skating on it—it was getting into December. And they would be going into Old Man Hammil's store for skates and straps and heel plates and files. And he remembered his first pair of skates, and how his father had taught him the proper way to keep them sharp with a file. He and the old dad had always been pretty good pals, and——

Good God! Why *should* he be coming back to that? And to Old Man Hammil's store? It was that confounded cockroach there, reminding him of Old Man Hammil, that had done it. He wanted to die decently and quietly, and as quickly as might be, without thinking of all these things. He didn't want to lie there and die of starvation, he wanted to kill himself and be done with it with-

out further misery—and it was a part of the ridiculous futility of his life, his baffled and broken and insignificant life, that he couldn't even kill himself competently—that he lay there suffering and ineffectual and full of self-pity, a prey to memories and harassing visions of the past, all mingled with youth and innocence and love, without the means of a quick escape. It was that damned cockroach, looking like Old Man Hammil, the village hardware merchant, that had brought back the village and his youth to him, and all those intolerable recollections.

He took his dirty pillow and feebly menaced the cockroach. Feeble as the gesture was, the insect took alarm. It disappeared from the footboard of the bed. A minute later, however, he saw it climbing the wall. It reached the ceiling, and crawled to the center of the room. Mr. Gooley watched it. He felt as if he, too, could crawl along the ceiling. He had the crazy notion of trying. After all, he told himself light-headedly, Old Cockroach Hammil up there on the ceiling had been friendly—the only friendly thing, human or otherwise, that had made overtures to him in many, many months. And he had scared Cockroach Hammil away! He shed some more maudlin tears.

What was the thing doing now? He watched as the insect climbed on to the gas pipe that came down from the ceiling. It descended the rod and perched itself on the gas jet. From this point of

vantage it began once more to regard Mr. Gooley with a singular intentness.

Ah! Gas! That was it! What a fool he had been not to think of it sooner! That was the way people killed themselves! Gas!

Mr. Gooley got himself weakly out of bed. He would get the thing over as quickly as possible now. It would be damnably unpleasant before he lost consciousness, no doubt, and painful. But likely not more unpleasant and painful than his present state. And he simply could not bear any more of those recollections, any more visions.

He turned his back on the cockroach, which was watching him from the gas jet, and went methodically to work. The window rattled; between the upper and lower sashes there was a crevice a quarter of an inch wide. He plugged it with paper. There was a break in the wall of his closet; the plaster had fallen away, and a chink allowed the cockroaches from his room easy access to the closet of the adjoining room. He plugged that also, and was about to turn his attention to the keyhole, when there came a knock on his door.

Mr. Gooley's first thought was: "What can any one want with a dead man?" For he looked upon himself as already dead. There came a second knock, more peremptory than the first, and he said mechanically, "Come in!" It would have to be postponed a few minutes, that was all.

The door opened, and in walked his landlady. She was a tall and bulky and worried-looking

woman, who wore a faded blond wig that was always askew, and Mr. Gooley was afraid of her. Her wig was more askew than usual when she entered, and he gathered from this that she was angry about something—why the devil must she intrude her trivial mundane anger upon himself, a doomed man? It was not seemly.

"Mr. Gooley," she began severely, without preamble, "I have always looked on you as a gentleman."

"Yes?" he murmured dully.

"But you ain't," she continued. "You ain't no better than a cheat."

He shrugged his shoulders patiently. He supposed that she was right about it. He owed her three weeks' room rent, and he was going to die and beat her out of it. But he couldn't help it.

"It ain't the room rent," she went on, as if vaguely cognizant of the general trend of his thoughts. "It ain't the room rent alone. You either pay me that or you don't pay me that, and if you don't, out you go. But while you are here, you must conduct yourself as a gentleman should!"

"Well," murmured Mr. Gooley, "haven't I?"

And the cockroach, perched on the gas jet above the landlady's head, and apparently listening to this conversation, moved several of his legs, as if in surprise.

"You have not!" said the landlady, straightening her wig.

"What have I done, Mrs. Hinkley?" asked Mr.

Gooley humbly. And Old Cockroach Hammil from his perch also made signs of inquiry.

"What have you done! What have you done!" cried Mrs. Hinkley. "As if the man didn't know what he had done! You've been stealin' my gas, that's what you have been doin'—stealin', I say, and there's no other word for it!"

Mr. Gooley started guiltily. He had not been stealing her gas, but it came over him with a shock for the first time that that was what he had, in effect, been planning to do. The cockroach, as if it also felt convicted of sin, gave the gas jet a glance of horror and moved up the rod to the ceiling, where it continued to listen.

"Stealin'!" repeated Mrs. Hinkley. "That's what it is, nothin' else but stealin'. You don't ever stop to think when you use one of them gas plates to cook in your room, Mr. Gooley—which it is expressly forbid and agreed on that no cooking shall be done in these rooms when they're rented to you—that it's my gas you're using, and that I have to pay for it, and that it's just as much stealin' as if you was to put your hand into my pocketbook and take my money!"

"Cooking? Gas plate?" muttered Mr. Gooley.

"Don't say you ain't got one!" cried Mrs. Hinkley. "You all got 'em! Every last one of you! Don't you try to come none of your sweet innocence dodges over me. I know you, and the whole tribe of you! I ain't kept lodgers for thirty years without knowing the kind of people they be! 'Gas

plate! Gas plate!' says you, as innocent as if you didn't know what a gas plate was! You got it hid here somewheres, and I ain't going to stir from this room until I get my hands on it and squash it under my feet! Come across with it, Mr. Gooley, come across with it!"

"But I *haven't* one," said Mr. Gooley, very ill and very weary. "You can look, if you want to."

And he lay back upon the bed. The cockroach slyly withdrew himself from the ceiling, came down the wall, and crawled to the foot of the bed again. If Mrs. Hinkley noticed him, she said nothing; perhaps it was not a part of her professional policy to draw attention to cockroaches on the premises. She stood and regarded Mr. Gooley for some moments, while he turned his head away from her in apathy. Her first anger seemed to have spent itself. But finally, with a new resolution, she said:

"And look I will! You got one, or else that blondined party in the next room has lied."

She went into the closet and he heard her opening his trunk. She pulled it into the bedroom and examined the interior. It didn't take long. She dived under the bed and drew out his battered suitcase, so dilapidated that he had not been able to get a quarter for it at the pawnshop, but no more dilapidated than his trunk.

She seemed struck, for the first time since her entrance, with the utter bareness of the room. Outside of the bed, one chair, the bureau, and Mr.

Gooley's broken shoes at the foot of the bed, there was absolutely nothing in it.

She sat down in the chair beside the bed. "Mr. Gooley," she said, "you *ain't* got any gas plate."

"No," he said.

"Mr. Gooley," she said, "you got *nothing at all!*"

"No," he said, "nothing."

"You had a passel of books and an overcoat five or six weeks ago," she said, "when you come here. It was seein' them books, and knowing what you was four or five years ago, when you lived here once before, that made me sure you was a gentleman."

Mr. Gooley made no reply. The cockroach on the foot of the bed also seemed to be listening to see if Mrs. Hinkley had anything more to say, and suspending judgment.

"Mr. Gooley," said the landlady, "I beg your pardon. You was lied on by one that has a gas plate herself, and when I taxed her with it, and took it away from her, and got rid of her, she had the impudence to say she thought it was *allowed,* and that everybody done it, and named you as one that did."

Mrs. Hinkley paused, but neither Mr. Gooley nor the cockroach had anything to contribute to the conversation.

"Gas," continued Mrs. Hinkley, "is gas. And gas costs money. I hadn't orter jumped on you the way I did, Mr. Gooley, but gas plates has got

to be what you might call corns on my brain, Mr. Gooley. They're my sensitive spot, Mr. Gooley. If I was to tell you the half of what I have had to suffer from gas plates during the last thirty years, Mr. Gooley, you wouldn't believe it! There's them that will cheat you one way and there's them that will cheat you another, but the best of them will cheat you with gas plates, Mr. Gooley. With the exception of yourself, Mr. Gooley, I ain't had a lodger in thirty years that wouldn't rob me on the gas. Some don't think it's stealin', Mr. Gooley, when they steal gas. And some of 'em don't care if it is. But there ain't none of 'em ever thinks what a *landlady* goes through with, year in and year out."

She paused for a moment, and then, overcome with self-pity, she began to sniffle.

"And my rent's been raised on me again, Mr. Gooley! And I'm a month behind! And if I ain't come across with the two months, the old month and the new, by day after to-morrow, out I goes; and it means the poorhouse as fur as I can see, because I don't know anything else but keeping lodgers, and I got no place to go!"

She gathered her apron up and wiped her eyes and nose with it. The cockroach on the footboard wiped his front set of feet across his face sympathetically.

"I got it all ready but fifteen dollars," continued Mrs. Hinkley, "and then in comes the gas bill this morning with *arrears* onto it. It is them

arrears, Mr. Gooley, that always knocks me out! If it wasn't for them arrears, I could get along. And now I got to pay out part of the rent money onto the gas bill, with them arrears on it, or the gas will be shut off this afternoon."

The pain in Mr. Gooley's head was getting worse. He wished she would go. He hated hearing her troubles. But she continued:

"It's the way them arrears come onto the bill, Mr. Gooley, that has got me sore. About a week before you come here again to live, Mr. Gooley, there was a fellow stole fifteen dollars' worth of my gas all at once. He went and killed himself, Mr. Gooley, and he used my gas to do it with. It leaked out of two jets for forty-eight hours up on the top floor, before the door was busted in and the body was found, and it came to fifteen dollars, and all on account of that man's cussedness, Mr. Gooley, I will likely get turned out into the street, and me sixty years old and no place to turn."

Mr. Gooley sat up in bed feebly and looked at her. She *was* in real trouble—in about as much trouble as he was. The cockroach walked meditatively up and down the footboard, as if thinking it over very seriously.

Mrs. Hinkley finally rose.

"Mr. Gooley," she said, regarding him sharply, "you look kind o' done up!"

"Uh-huh," said Mr. Gooley.

She lingered in the room for a few seconds more, irresolutely, and then departed.

Mr. Gooley thought. Gas was barred to him now. He couldn't bring himself to do it with gas. There was still a chance that the old woman might get hold of the gas money and the rent money, too, and go on for a few years, but if he selfishly stole twelve or fifteen dollars' worth of gas from her this afternoon it might be just the thing that would plunge her into immediate destitution. At any rate, it was, as she had said, like stealing money from her pocketbook. He thought of what her life as a rooming-house keeper must have been, and pitied her. He had known many rooming houses. The down-and-outers know how to gauge the reality and poignancy of the troubles of the down-and-out. No, he simply could not do it with gas.

He must think of some other method. He was on the fourth floor. He might throw himself out of the window onto the brick walk at the back of the building, and die. He shuddered as he thought of it. To jump from a twentieth story, or from the top of the Woolworth Tower, to a certain death is one thing. To contemplate a fall of three or four stories that may maim you without killing you, is another.

Nevertheless, he would do it. He pulled the paper out of the crevice between the window sashes, opened the window and looked down. He saw the back stoop and there was a dirty mop beside it; there was an ash can, and there were two garbage cans there. And there was a starved cat that sat and looked up at him. He had a

tremor and drew back and covered his face with his hands as he thought of that cat—that knowing cat, that loathsome, that obscene cat.

He sat down on the edge of the bed to collect his strength and summon his resolution. The cockroach had crawled to the head of the bed and seemed to wish to partake of his thoughts.

"Damn you, Old Archibald Hammil!" he cried. And he scooped the cockroach into his hand with a sudden sweep and flung it out of the window. The insect fell without perceptible discomfort, and at once began to climb up the outside wall again, making for the window.

The door opened and Mrs. Hinkley entered, her face cleft with a grin, and a tray in her hands.

"Mr. Gooley," she said, setting it on the wash-stand, "I'll bet you ain't had nothing to eat to-day!"

On the tray was a bowl of soup, a half loaf of bread with a long keen bread knife, a pat of butter, a boiled egg and a cup of coffee.

"No, nor yesterday, either," said Mr. Gooley, and he looked at the soup and at the long keen bread knife.

"Here's something else I want to show you, Mr. Gooley," said the landlady, dodging out of the door and back in again instantly. She bore in her hands this time a surprising length of flexible gas tubing, and a small nickel-plated pearl-handled revolver.

"You see that there gas tubing?" she said.

"That is what that blondined party in the next room had on to her gas plate—the nerve of her! Strung from the gas jet clear across the room to the window sill. And when I throwed her out, Mr. Gooley, she wouldn't pay her rent, and I took this here revolver to part pay it. What kind of a woman is it, Mr. Gooley, that has a revolver in her room, and a loaded one, too?"

Just then the doorbell rang in the dim lower regions, and she left the room to answer it.

And Mr. Gooley sat and looked at the knife, with which he might so easily stab himself, and at the gas cord, with which he might so easily hang himself, and at the loaded revolver, with which he might so easily shoot himself.

He looked also at the bowl of soup.

He had the strength to reflect—a meal is a meal. But *after* that meal, what? Penniless, broken in health, friendless, a failure—why prolong it for another twenty-four hours? A meal would prolong it, but that was all a meal *would* do—and after that would come the suffering and the despair and the end to be faced all over again.

Was he man enough to take the pistol and do it now?

Or did true manhood lie the other way? Was he man enough to drink the soup, and dare to live and hope?

Just then the cockroach, which had climbed into the window and upon the washstand, made for the bowl of soup.

"Here!" cried Mr. Gooley, grabbing the bowl in both hands, "Old Man Hammil! Get away from that soup!"

And the bowl being in his hands, he drank.

"What do you mean by Old Man Hammil?"

It was Mrs. Hinkley who spoke. She stood again in the doorway, with a letter in her hands and a look of wonder on her face.

Mr. Gooley set down the soup bowl. By an effort of the will he had only drunk half the liquid. He had heard somewhere that those who are suffering from starvation had better go slow at first when they get hold of food again. And he already felt better, warmed and resurrected, from the first gulp.

"What," demanded the landlady, "do you mean by yelling out about Old Man Hammil?"

"Why," said Mr. Gooley, feeling foolish, and looking it, "I was talking to that cockroach there. He looks sort of like some one I knew when I was a kid, by the name of Hammil—Archibald Hammil."

"*Where* was you a kid?" asked Mrs. Hinkley.

"In a place called Mapletown—Mapletown, Illinois," said Mr. Gooley. "There's where I knew Old Man Hammil."

"Well," said the landlady, "when you go back there you won't see him. He's dead. He died a week ago. This letter tells it. I was his niece. And the old man went and left me his hardware store. I never expected it. But all his kids is

dead—it seems he outlived 'em all, and he was nearly ninety when he passed away."

"Well," said Mr. Gooley, "I don't remember you."

"You wouldn't," said the landlady. "You must have been in short pants when I ran away from home and married the hardware drummer. But I'll bet you the old-timers in that burg still remembers it against me!"

"The kids will be coming into that store about now to get their skates sharpened," said Mr. Gooley, looking at the boiled egg.

"Uh-huh!" said Mrs. Hinkley. "Don't you want to go back home and help sharpen 'em? I'm goin' back and run that there store, and I'll need a clerk, I suppose."

"Uh-huh," said Mr. Gooley, breaking the eggshell.

The cockroach, busy with a crumb on the floor, waved his three starboard legs genially at Mr. Gooley and Mrs. Hinkley—as if, in fact, he were winking with his feet.

IV.—McDermott

IV.—McDermott

McDermott had gone over with a cargo of mules. The animals were disembarked at a Channel port, received by officers of that grand organization which guesses right so frequently, the Quartermaster Corps, and started in a southerly direction, in carload lots, toward the Toul sector of the Western Front. McDermott went with one of the carloads in an unofficial capacity. He had no business in the war zone. But the Quartermaster Corps, or that part of it in charge of his particular car, was in no mood to be harsh toward any one who seemed to understand the wants and humors of mules and who was willing to associate with them. And so, with his blue overalls and his red beard, McDermott went along.

"I'll have a look at the war," said McDermott, 'and if I like it, I'll jine it."

"And if you don't like it," said the teamster to whom he confided his intention, "I reckon you'll stop it?"

"I dunno," replied McDermott, "as I would be justified in stoppin' a good war. The McDernotts has niver been great hands f'r stoppin' wars.

The McDermotts is always more like to be startin' wars."

McDermott got a look at the war sooner than any one, including the high command of the Entente Allies, would have thought likely—or, rather, the war got a look at McDermott. The carload of mules, separated from its right and proper train, got too far eastward at just the time the Germans got too far westward. It was in April, 1918, that, having entered Hazebrouck from the north, McDermott and his mules left it again, bound eastward. They passed through a turmoil of guns and lorries, Scotchmen and ambulances, Englishmen, tanks and ammunition wagons, Irishmen, colonials and field kitchens, all moving slowly eastward, and came to a halt at a little village where they should not have been at all, halfway between the northern rim of the forest of Nieppe and Bailleul.

The mules did not stay there long.

"I'll stretch me legs a bit," said McDermott, climbing off the car and strolling toward a Grand Place surrounded by sixteenth-century architecture. And just then something passed over the Renaissance roofs with the scream of one of Dante's devils, struck McDermott's car of mules with great noise and a burst of flame, and straightway created a situation in which there was neither car nor mules.

For a minute it seemed to McDermott that possibly there was no McDermott, either. When M

Dermott regained consciousness of McDermott, he was sitting on the ground, and he sat there and felt of himself for many seconds before he spoke or rose. Great guns he had been hearing for hours, and a rattle and roll of small-arms fire had been getting nearer all that day; but it seemed to McDermott that there was something quite vicious and personal about the big shell that had separated him forever from his mules. Not that he had loved the mules, but he loved McDermott.

"Mules," said he, still sitting on the ground, but trying to get his philosophy of life on to its legs again, "is here wan minute an' gawn the nixt. Mules is fickle an' untrustworthy animals. Here was thim mules, wigglin' their long ears and arskin' f'r Gawd's sake c'u'd they have a dhrink of wather, an' promisin' a lifelong friendship—but where is thim mules now?"

He scratched his red head as he spoke, feeling of an old scar under the thick thatch of hair. The wound had been made some years previously with a bung starter, and whenever McDermott was agitated he caressed it tenderly.

He got up, turned about and regarded the extraordinary Grande Place. There had once been several pretty little shops about it, he could see, with pleasant courtyards, where the April sun was trying to bring green things into life again, but now some of these were in newly made and smoking ruins. The shell that had stricken McDermott's mules from the roster of existence had not

been the only one to fall into the village recently.

But it was neither old ruins nor new ruins that interested McDermott chiefly. It was the humanity that flowed through the Grande Place in a feeble trickle westward, and the humanity that stayed there.

Women and old men went by with household treasures slung in bundles or pushed before them in carts and perambulators, and they were wearing their best clothes, as if they were going to some village fête, instead of into desolation and homelessness; the children whom they carried, or who straggled after them, were also in their holiday best. Here was an ancient peasant with a coop of skinny chickens on a barrow; there was a girl in a silk gown carrying something in a bed quilt; yonder was a boy of twelve on a bicycle, and two things were tied to the handlebars—a loaf of bread and a soldier's bayonet. Perhaps it had been his father's bayonet. Quietly they went westward; their lips were dumb and their faces showed their souls were dumb, too. A long time they had heard the battle growling to the eastward; and now the war was upon them. It was upon them, indeed; for as McDermott gazed, another shell struck full upon a bell-shaped tower that stood at the north side of the Grande Place and it leaped up in flames and fell in dust and ruin, all gone but one irregular point of masonry that still stuck out like a snaggle tooth from a trampled skull.

These were the ones that were going, and almost

the last of the dreary pageant disappeared as McDermott watched. But those who stayed astonished him even more by their strange actions and uncouth postures.

"Don't tell me," mumbled McDermott, rubbing his scar, "that all thim sojers is aslape!"

But asleep they were. To the east and to the north the world was one rip and rat-a-tat of rifle and machine-gun fire—how near, McDermott could not guess—and over the village whined and droned the shells, of great or lesser caliber; here was one gate to a hell of noise, and the buildings stirred and the budding vines in the courtyards moved and the dust itself was agitated with the breath and blast of far and near concussions; but yet the big open Place itself was held in the grip of a grotesque and incredible slumber.

Sprawled in the gutters, collapsed across the doorsills, leaning against the walls, slept that portion of the British army; slept strangely, without snoring. In the middle of the Grande Place there was a young lieutenant bending forward across the wreck of a motor car; he had tried to pluck forth a basket from the tonneau and sleep had touched him with his fingers on the handle. And from the eastern fringes of the village there entered the square, as actors enter upon a stage, a group of a dozen men, with their arms linked together, swaying and dazed and stumbling. At first McDermott thought that wounded were being helped from the field. But these men were not wounded; they were

walking in their sleep, and the group fell apart, as McDermott looked at them, and sank severally to the cobblestones. Scotchmen, Canadians, English, torn and battered remnants of many different commands, they had striven with their guns and bodies for more than a week to dam the vast, rising wave of the German attack—day melting into night and night burning into day again, till there was no such thing as time to them any longer; there were but two things in the world, battle and weariness, weariness and battle.

McDermott moved across the square unchallenged. He had eaten and slept but little for two days himself, and he made instinctively for the open door of an empty inn, to search for food. In the doorway he stumbled across a lad who roused and spoke to him.

"Jack," said the boy, looking at him with red eyes out of an old, worn face, "have you got the makin's?"

He was in a ragged and muddied Canadian uniform, but McDermott guessed that he was an American.

"I have that," said McDermott, producing papers and tobacco. But the boy had lapsed into slumber again. McDermott rolled the cigarette for him, placed it between his lips, waked him and lighted it for him.

The boy took a puff or two, and then said dreamily: "And what the hell are you doin' here with them blue overalls on?"

"I come to look at the war," said McDermott.

The soldier glanced around the Grande Place, and a gleam of deviltry flashed through his utter exhaustion. "So you come to see the war, huh? Well, don't you wake it now. It's restin'. But if you'll take a chair and set down, I'll have it—called —for—you—in—in—in 'n 'our—or so——"

His voice tailed off into sleep once more; he mangled the cigarette, the tobacco mingling with the scraggly beard about his drawn mouth; his head fell forward upon his chest. McDermott stepped past him into the Hôtel Fauçon, as the inn had called itself. He found no food, but he found liquor there.

"Frinch booze," said McDermott, getting the cork out of a bottle of brandy and sniffing it; "but booze is booze!"

And more booze is more booze, especially upon an empty stomach. It was after the fourth drink that McDermott pulled his chair up to one of the open windows of the inn and sat down, with the brandy beside him.

"I'm neglictin' that war I come all this way to see," said McDermott.

The Grande Place, still shaken by the tremendous and unceasing pulsations of battle, far and near, was beginning to wake up. A fresh, or, at least, a fresher, battalion was arriving over the spur line of railroad along which McDermott's mules had been so mistakenly shunted, and was moving eastward through the town to the firing

line. The men whom McDermott had seen asleep were rising at the word of command; taking their weapons, falling in, and staggering back to the interminable battle once more.

"I dunno," mused McDermott, as the tired men straggled past, "whether I want to be afther j'inin' that war or not. It makes all thim lads that slapey! I dunno phwat the devil it is, the Frinch booze bein' so close to me, inside, or that war so close to me, outside, but I'm gittin' slapey m'silf."

It was, likely, the brandy. There had not been a great deal of French brandy in McDermott's previous experience, and he did not stint himself. It was somewhere between the ninth and the fifteenth swallows of it that McDermott remarked to himself, rubbing the scar on his head:

"I w'u'd jine that war now, if I c'u'd be sure which way it had wint!"

And then he slid gently out of his chair and went to sleep on the floor just inside the open window of the Hôtel Fauçon.

The war crept closer and took another look at McDermott. As the warm golden afternoon waned, the British troops, fighting like fiends for every inch of ground, exacting a ghastly toll of lives from the Germans, were forced back into the eastern outskirts of the town. There, with rifle and machine gun, from walls, trees, courtyards, roofs and ruins, they held the advancing Germans for an hour. But they were pushed back again,

doggedly establishing themselves in the houses of the Grande Place. Neither British nor Germans were dropping shells into that village now, each side fearful of damaging its own men.

A British subaltern with a machine gun and two private soldiers entered the inn and were setting the gun up at McDermott's window when a German bullet struck the officer and he fell dead across the slumbering McDermott. Nevertheless, the gun was manned and fought for half an hour above McDermott, who stirred now and then, but did not waken. Just at dusk an Irish battalion struck the Germans on the right flank of their assaulting force, a half mile to the north of the village, rolled them back temporarily, and cleared the village of them. This counter attack took the firing line a good thousand yards eastward once more.

McDermott roused, crawled from beneath the body of the British officer, and viewed it with surprise. "That war has been here ag'in an' me aslape," said McDermott. "I might jine that war if I c'u'd ketch up wid it—but 'tis here, 'tis there, 'tis gawn ag'in! An' how c'u'd I jine it wid no weapons, not even a good thick club to m' hands?"

He foraged and found a piece of sausage that he had overlooked in his former search, ate it greedily and then stood in the doorway, listening to the sound of the firing. It was getting dark and northward toward Messines and Wytschaete and southward for more miles than he could guess the lightning of big guns flickered along the sky.

"Anny way I w'u'd go," mused McDermott, "I w'u'd run into that war if I was thryin' to dodge ut. And anny way I w'u'd go, I w'u'd miss that war if I was thryin' to come up wid ut. An' till I make up me mind which wan I want to do, here will I sthay."

He opened another bottle of brandy, and drank and cogitated. Whether it was the cogitation or the drinks or the effect of the racket of war, his head began to ache dully. When McDermott's scar ached, it was his custom to take another drink. After a while there came a stage at which, if it still ached, he at least ceased to feel it aching any more.

"The hotel here," he remarked, "is filled wid hospitality and midical tratement, and where bether c'u'd I be?"

And presently, once more, a deep sleep overtook him. A deeper, more profound sleep, indeed, than his former one. And this time the war came still nearer to McDermott.

The British were driven back again and again occupied the town, the Germans in close pursuit. From house to house and from wall to wall the struggle went on, with grenade, rifle and bayonet. A German, with a Scotchman's steel in his chest, fell screaming, back through the open window, and his blood as he died soaked McDermott's feet. But McDermott slept. Full night came, thick and cloudy, and both sides sent up floating flares. The square was strewn with the bodies of the dead

and the bodies of the maimed in increasing numbers; the wounded groaned and whimpered in the shadows of the trampled Place, crawling, if they still could crawl, to whatever bit of broken wall seemed to offer momentary shelter and praying for the stretcher bearers to be speedy. But still McDermott slept.

At ten o'clock that night two Englishmen once more brought a machine gun into the Hôtel Fauçon; they worked the weapon for twenty minutes from the window within ten feet of which McDermott now lay with his brandy bottle beside him. Once McDermott stirred; he sat up sleepily on the floor and murmured: "An' where is that war now? Begad, an' I don't belave there is anny war!"

And he rolled over and went to sleep again. The men with the machine gun did not notice him; they were too busy. A moment later one of them sank with a bullet through his heart. His comrade lasted a little longer, and then he, too, went down, a wound in his lungs. It took him some weary minutes to choke and bleed to death, there in that dark place, upon the floor, among the dead men and McDermott's brandy bottles and the heap of ammunition he had brought with him. His struggle did not wake McDermott.

By midnight the British had been driven back until they held the houses at the west end of the town and the end of the spur railroad that came eastward from Hazebrouck. The Germans were

in the eastern part of the village, and between was a "no man's land," of which the Grande Place was a part. What was left of the Hôtel Fauçon, with the sleeping McDermott in it, was toward the middle of the south side of the square. In the streets to the north and south of the Place patrols still clashed with grenade and bayonet and rifle, but the Germans attempted no further advance in any force after midnight. No doubt they were bringing up more men; no doubt, with the first morning light, they would move forward a regiment or two, possibly even a division, against the British who still clung stubbornly to the western side of the town. All the way from Wytschaete south to Givenchy the battle-line was broken up into many little bitter struggles of this sort, the British at every point facing great odds.

When dawn came, there came with it a mist. And three men of a German patrol, creeping from house to house and ruin to ruin along the south side of that part of "no man's land" which was the Grande Place, entered the open door of the Hôtel Fauçon.

One of them stepped upon McDermott's stomach, where he lay sleeping and dreaming of the war he had come to look at.

McDermott, when he had been drinking, was often cross. And especially was he cross if, when sleeping off his liquor, some one purposely or inadvertently interfered with his rightful and legitimate rest. When this coarse and heavy-footed in-

truder set his boot, albeit unwittingly, upon McDermott's stomach, McDermott sat up with a bellow of rage, instinctively and instantaneously grabbed the leg attached to the boot, rose as burning rocks rise from a volcano, with the leg in his hands, upset the man attached to the leg, and jumped with two large feet accurately upon the back of that person's neck. Whereupon the Boche went to Valhalla. McDermott, though nearer fifty than forty years old, was a barroom fighter of wonderful speed and technique, and this instinctive and spontaneous maneuver was all one motion, just as it is all one motion when a cat in a cellar leaps over a sack of potatoes, lands upon a rat, and sinks her teeth into a vital spot. The second German and the third German hung back an instant toward the door, and then came on toward the moving shadow in the midst of shadows. For their own good they should have come on without hanging back that second; but perhaps their training, otherwise so efficient, did not include barroom tactics. Their hesitation gave McDermott just the time he needed, for when he faced them he had the first German's gun in his hands.

"No war," said McDermott, "can come into me slapin' chamber and stand on me stomach like that, and expict me to take it peaceful!"

With the words he fired the first German's rifle into the second German. The third German, to the rear of the second one, fired his gun simul-

taneously, but perhaps he was a bit flurried, for he also fired directly into the second German, and there was nothing the second German could do but die; which he did at once. McDermott leaped at the third German with his rifle clubbed just as the man pressed the trigger again. The bullet struck McDermott's rifle, splintered the butt of it and knocked it from his hands; but a second later McDermott's hands were on the barrel of the German's gun and the two of them were struggling for it.

There is one defect in the German military system, observers say: the drill masters do not teach their men independent thinking; perhaps the drill-masters do not have the most promising material to work upon. At any rate, it occurred to McDermott to kick the third German in the stomach while the third German was still thinking of nothing else than trying to depress the gun to shoot or bayonet McDermott. Thought and kick were as well coördinated as if they had proceeded from one of McDermott's late mules.

The Boche went to the floor of the Hôtel Fauçon with a groan. "Gott!" he said.

"A stomach f'r a stomach," said Mc-Dermott, standing over him with the rifle. "Git up!"

The German painfully arose.

"Ye are me prisoner," said McDermott, "an' the furst wan I iver took. Hould up y'r hands! Hould thim up, I say! Not over y'r stomach, man, but over y'r head!"

The Boche complied hurriedly.

"I see ye understhand United States," said McDermott. "I was afraid ye might not, an' I w'u'd have to shoot ye."

"Kamerad!" exclaimed the man.

"Ye are no comrade av mine," said McDermott, peering at the man's face through the eery half-light of early morning, "an' comrade av mine ye niver was! I know ye well! Ye are Goostave Schmidt b' name, an' wanst ye tinded bar in a dive down b' the Brooklyn wather front!"

The man stared at McDermott in silence for a long minute, and then recollection slowly came to him.

"MagDermodd!" he said. "Batrick MagDermodd!"

"The same," said McDermott.

"Gott sei dank!" said the German. "I haf fallen into der hands of a friend." And with the beginning of a smile he started to lower his hands.

"Put thim up!" cried McDermott. "Don't desave y'silf! Ye are no fri'nd av mine!"

The smile faded, and something like a look of panic took its place on the German's face.

"Th' last time I saw ye, ye was in bad company, f'r ye was alone," said McDermott. "An' I come over here lookin' f'r ye, an' I find ye in bad company ag'in!"

"Looking?" said the German with quite sincere perplexity. "You gome here *looking* for me?"

The wonder on the man's face at this unpre-

meditated jest of his having crossed the Atlantic especially to look for Gustave Schmidt titillated McDermott's whole being. But he did not laugh, and he let the German wonder. "And phwy sh'u'd I not?" he said.

The German thought intensely for a while. "Why *should* you gome all der vay agross der Adlandic looking for *me?*" he said finally.

"Ye have a short mimory," said McDermott. "Ye do not recollict the time ye hit me on the head wid a bung starter whin I was too soused to define m'silf? The scar is there yet, bad luck to ye!"

"But dot was nudding," said the German. "Dot bung-starder business was all a bart of der day's vork."

"But ye cript up behint me," said McDermott; "an' me soused!"

"But dot was der bractical vay to do it," said the German. "Dot was nuddings at all, dot bung-starder business. I haf forgodden it long ago!"

"The McDermotts remimber thim compliments longer," said McDermott. "An' b' rights I sh'u'd give ye wan good clout wid this gun and be done wid ye. But I'm thinkin' I may be usin' ye otherwise."

"You gome all der vay agross der Adlandic yoost because I hit you on der head mit a bung starder?" persisted the German, still wondering. "Dot, MagDermodd, I cannot belief—*Nein!*"

"And ye tore up y'r citizenship papers and come

all the way across the Atlantic just to jine this gang av murtherin' child-killers," said McDermott. "That I c'n belave! Yis!"

"But I haf not dorn up my American cidizen papers—*Nein!*" exclaimed the German, earnestly. "Dose I haf kept. I gome across to fight for mein Faderland—dot vas orders. *Ja!* But mein American cidizenship papers I haf kept, and ven der war is ofer I shall go back to Brooklyn and once more an American citizen be, undill der next war. *Ja!* You haf not understood, but dot is der vay of it. *Ja!*"

"Goostave," said McDermott, "ye have too many countries workin' f'r ye. But y'r takin' ordhers from m'silf now—do ye get that? C'n ye play that musical insthrumint there by the window?"

"*Ja!*" said Gustave. "Dot gun I can vork. Dot is der Lewis machine gun. Id is not so good a gun as our machine gun, for our machine gun haf been a colossal sugcess, but id is a goot gun."

"Ye been fightin' f'r the Kaiser f'r three or four years, Goostave," said McDermott, menacing him with his rifle, "but this mornin' I'll be afther seein' that ye do a bit av work f'r thim citizenship papers, an', later, ye can go to hell, if ye like, an' naturalize y'rsilf in still a third country. Ye will shoot Germans wid that gun till I get the hang av the mechanism m'silf. And thin I will shoot Germans wid that gun. But furst, ye will give me that fancy tin soup-bowl ye're wearin'."

Gustave handed over his helmet. McDermott put it on his red head.

"I've been thinkin'," said McDermott, "will I jine this war, or will I not jine it. An' the only way ye c'n tell do ye like a thing or do ye not is to thry it wance. Wid y'r assistance, Goostave, I'll thry it this mornin', if anny more av it comes my way."

More of it was coming his way. The Germans, tired of trifling with the small British force which held the village, had brought up the better part of a division during the night and were marshaling the troops for their favorite feat of arms, an overwhelming frontal attack *en masse*. The British had likewise received reinforcements, drawing from the north and from the south every man the hard-pressed lines could spare. But they were not many, perhaps some three thousand men in all, to resist the massed assault, with the railroad for its objective, which would surely come with dawn. If troops were needed in the village they were no less needed on the lines that flanked it. The little town, which had been the scene of so much desperate skirmishing the day before and during the first half of the night, was now about to become the ground of something like a battle.

"There's a French division on the way," said the British colonel in command in the village to one of his captains. "If we can only hold them for an hour——"

He did not finish the sentence. As he spoke the

German bombardment, precedent to the infantry attack, began to comb the western fringes of the town and the railroad line behind, searching for the hurriedly-digged and shallow trenches, the improvised dugouts, the shell holes, the cellars and the embankments where the British lay. The British guns to the rear of the village made answer, and the uproar tore the mists of dawn to tatters. A shell fell short, into the middle of the Grande Place, and McDermott saw the broken motor car against which the sleeping lieutenant had leaned the day before vanish into nothingness; and then a house directly opposite the Hôtel Fauçon jumped into flame and was no more. Looking out across the back of the stooping Gustave at the window, McDermott muttered, "I dunno as I w'u'd want to jine that war." And then he bellowed in Gustave Schmidt's ear: "Cut loose! Cut loose wid y'r gun! Cut loose!"

"I vill not!" shrieked Gustave. *"Mein Gott!* Dat is mein own regiment!"

"Ye lie!" shouted McDermott. "Ye will!" He thrust a bit of bayonet into the fleshiest part of the German's back.

"I vill! I vill!" cried Gustave.

"Ye will that," said McDermott, "an' the less damned nonsinse I hear from ye about y'r own rigimint the betther f'r ye! Ye're undher me own ordhers till I c'n make up me mind about this war."

The mists were rising. In the clearing daylight at the eastern end of the square, as if other clouds

were moving forward with a solid front, appeared the first gray wave of the German infantry. Close packed, shoulder to shoulder, three deep, they came, almost filling the space from side to side of the Grande Place, moving across that open stretch against the British fire with a certain heavy-footed and heavy-brained contempt of everything before them. Ten steps, and the British machine guns and rifles caught them. The first wave, or half of it, went down in a long writhing windrow, across the east end of the square, and in the instant that he saw it squirm and toss before the trampling second wave swept over it and through it, the twisting gray-clad figures on the stones reminded McDermott of the heaps of heaving worms he used to see at the bottom of his bait-can when he went fishing as a boy.

"Hold that nozzle lower, Goostave!" he yelled to his captive. "Spray thim! Spray thim! Ye're shootin' over their heads, ye lumberin' Dutchman, ye!"

"Gott!" cried Gustave, as another jab of the bayonet urged him to his uncongenial task.

And then McDermott made one of the few errors of his military career. Whether it was the French brandy he had drunk to excess the night before, or whether it was the old bung-starter wound on his head, which always throbbed and jumped when he became excited, his judgment deserted him for an instant. For one instant he forgot that there must be no instants free from the

immediate occupation of guiding and directing Gustave.

"Let me see if I can't work that gun m'self," he cried.

As he relaxed his vigilance, pushing the German to one side, the Boche suddenly struck him upon the jaw. McDermott reeled and dropped his rifle; before he could recover himself, the German had it. The weapon swung upward in the air and—just then a shell burst outside the open window of the Hôtel Fauçon.

Both men were flung from their feet by the concussion. For a moment everything was blank to McDermott. And then, stretching out his hand to rise, his fingers encountered something smooth and hard upon the floor. Automatically his grasp closed over it and he rose. At the same instant the German struggled to his feet, one hand behind his back, and the other extended, as if in entreaty.

"Kamerad," he whined, and even as he whined he lurched nearer and flung at McDermott a jagged, broken bottle. McDermott ducked, and the dagger-like glass splintered on his helmet. And then McDermott struck—once. Once was enough. The Boche sank to the floor without a groan, lifeless. McDermott looked at him, and then, for the first time, looked at what he held in his own hand, the weighty thing which he had wielded so instinctively and with such ferocity. It was the bung starter of the Hôtel Fauçon.

"Goostave niver knowed what hit him," said McDermott. And if there had been any one to hear, in all that din, a note of regret that Gustave never knew might have been remarked in his voice.

McDermott turned his attention to the machine gun, which, with its tripod, had been knocked to the floor. He squatted, with his head below the level of the window sill, and looked it over.

" 'Tis not broken," he decided, after some moments of examination. "Did Goostave do it so? Or did he do it so?" He removed his helmet and rubbed the scar under his red hair reflectively. "If I was to make up me mind to jine that war," mused McDermott, "this same w'u'd be a handy thing to take wid me. It w'u'd that! Now, did that Goostave that used to be here pull this pretty little thingumajig so? Or did he pull it *so?* I have ut! He pulled it *so!* And thim ca'tridges, now—do they feed in so? Or do they feed in so? 'T w'u'd be a handy thing, now, f'r a man that had anny intintions av jinin' the war to know about all thim things!"

And, patiently, McDermott studied the mechanism, while the red sunlight turned to yellow in the Grande Place outside, and the budding green vines withered along the broken walls, and the stones ran blood, and the Hôtel Fauçon began to fall to pieces about his ears. McDermott did not hurry; he felt that there was no need to hurry; he had not yet made up his mind whether he intended to participate in this war. By the time he

had learned how to work that machine gun, and had used it on the Germans for a while, he thought, he might be vouchsafed some light on that particular subject. It was one of McDermott's fixed beliefs that he was an extremely cautious sort of man, though many of his acquaintances thought of him differently, and he told himself that he must not get too far into this war until he was sure that it was going to be congenial. So far, it promised well.

And also, McDermott, as he puzzled over the machine gun, was not quite the normal McDermott. He was, rather, a supernormal McDermott. He had been awakened rudely from an alcoholic slumber and he had been rather busy ever since; so many things had taken place in his immediate neighborhood, and were still taking place, that he was not quite sure of their reality. As he sat on the floor and studied the weapon, he was actually, from moment to moment, more than half convinced that he was dreaming—he might awaken and find that that war had eluded him again. Perhaps he is scarcely to be chided for being in what is sometimes known as a state of mind.

And while McDermott was looking at the machine gun, the British commander prayed, as a greater British commander before him had prayed one time, for assistance, only this one did not pray for night or Blücher as Wellington had done. Night was many hours beyond all hope and would

probably bring its own hell when it came, and as for Prussians, there were too many Prussians now. His men would hold on; they had been holding on for epic days and unbelievable nights, and they would still hold while there was breath in their bodies, and when their bodies were breathless they would hold one minute more. But—God! For Foch's *poilus!* There is a moment which is the ultimate moment; the spirit can drag the body until—until spirit and body are wrenched into two things. No longer. His men could die in their tracks; they were dying where they stood and crouched and lay, by dozens and by scores and by heroic hundreds—but when they were dead, who would bar the way to Hazebrouck, and beyond Hazebrouck, to the channel ports?

That way was all but open now, if the enemy but realized it. Any moment they might discover it. A half-mile to the south of the village the line was so thinly held that one strong, quick thrust must make a gap. Let the enemy but fling a third of the troops he was pounding to pieces in the bloody streets of the town, in the torn fields that flanked it, and in the shambles of the Grande Place that was the center of this action, at that weak spot, and all was over. But with a fury mechanical, insensate, the Germans still came on in direct frontal attacks.

The British had slain and slain and slain, firing into the gray masses until the water boiled in the jackets of the machine guns. Five attacks had

broken down in the Grande Place itself—and now a sixth was forming. Should he still hold fast, the colonel asked himself, or should he retire, saving what machine guns he might, and flinging a desperate detachment southward in the attempt to make a stronger right flank? But to do that might be the very move that would awaken the Germans to their opportunity there. So long as they pounded, pounded at his center, he would take a toll of them, at least—but the moment was coming——

. . . . . .

"I have ut!" cried McDermott, and mounted his gun at the window.

. . . . . .

"It is time to retire," said the British colonel, and was about to give the order.

. . . . . .

"Right in their bloody backs," said McDermott to himself.

And so it was. For the sixth advance of the German masses had carried them well into the Grande Place. McDermott, crouched at his window, cut loose with his gun at pointblank range as the first wave, five men deep, passed by him, splashing along the thick ranks from behind as one might sweep a garden hose down a row of vegetables. Taken thus in the rear, ambushed, with no knowledge of the strength of the attacking force behind them, the German shock troops swayed and staggered, faced about and fell and broke. For right

into the milling herd of them, and into the second advancing wave, the British poured their bullets. The colonel, who had been about to order a retreat, ordered a charge, and before the stampeded remnant of the first two waves could recover themselves the British were on them with grenades and bayonets, flinging them back into the third wave, just advancing to their support, in a bleeding huddle of defeat.

McDermott saw the beginning of that charge, and with his bung starter in his hand he rushed from the door to join it. But he did not see the end of it, nor did he see the *poilus,* as they came slouching into the village five minutes later to give the repulse weight and confirmation, redolent of onions and strange stews, but with their bayonets —those bayonets that are part of the men who wield them, living things, instinct with the beautiful, straight, keen soul of France herself.

McDermott did not see them, for some more of the Hôtel Fauçon had fallen on him, crushing one of his ankles and giving him a clout on the head.

"Whoever it was turned loose that machine gun from the inn window, did the trick," said the colonel, later. "It's hardly too much to say that he blocked the way to Hazebrouck—for the time, at least, if one man can be said to have done such a thing—what's that?"

"That" was McDermott, who was being carried forth, unconscious, to an ambulance. It was his

blue overalls that had occasioned the colonel's surprise. He was neither French nor British nor German; palpably he was a civilian, and a civilian who had no business there. And in his hand he clasped a bung starter. His fingers were closed over it so tightly that in the base hospital later they found difficulty in taking it away from him.

Owing, no doubt, to the blow on his head, McDermott was unable to recall clearly anything that had taken place from the moment he had first fallen asleep under the influence of French brandy until he awakened in the hospital nearly four weeks later. During this period there had been several intervals of more open-eyed dreaming, succeeded by lapses into profound stupor; but even in these open-eyed intervals, McDermott had not been himself. It was during one of these intervals that a representative of the French Government bestowed the *Croix de Guerre* upon McDermott, for it had been learned that he was the man behind the machine gun that had turned the tide of combat.

McDermott, his eyes open, but his mind in too much of a daze even to wonder what the ceremony was about, sat in a wheel chair, and in company with half a dozen other men selected for decoration, listened to a brief oration in very good French, which he could not have understood had he been normal. In answer he muttered in a low tone, rubbing his broken and bandaged head: "I think maybe I will jine that war, afther all!"

The French officer assumed that McDermott had spoken some sort of compliment to France and kissed McDermott on both cheeks, in front of the hospital staff, several American reporters, and as much of the French army as could be spared to do honor to the occasion. The *Croix de Guerre* made no impression upon McDermott, but the kiss briefly arrested his wandering consciousness, and he cried out, starting up in his chair and menacing the officer: "Where is me bung starter?" Then he fainted.

A good many thousands of people in France and England and America learned from the newspapers the story of the nondescript in the blue overalls, who had behaved so gallantly at the crucial moment of a crucial fight. But McDermott never did. He seldom read newspapers. No one had been able to learn his name, so the reporters had given him a name. They called him "Dennis." And it was "Dennis" who got the fame and glory. McDermott would not have identified himself with Dennis had he seen the newspapers. When he awakened from his long, broken stupor, with its intervals of dazed half-consciousness, the first thing he did was to steal away from that hospital; he left without having heard of Dennis or of the decoration of Dennis.

There was one thing that he had experienced that did live hazily and confusedly in his memory, however, although he could not fix it in its relationship to any other thing. And that was the fact

that he had met Gustave Schmidt. Three or four months after he slipped away from the hospital—a period of unchronicled wanderings, during which he had tried unsuccessfully to enlist several times—he limped into a saloon on the Brooklyn water front and asked Tim O'Toole, the proprietor, for his usual. He had just got back to Brooklyn, and he carried his earthly possessions in a bundle wrapped in brown paper.

"I hear Yordy Crowley isn't givin' his racket this year," said McDermott, laying his bundle on the bar and pouring out his drink.

"He is not," said Tim. "He is in France helpin' out thim English."

"Yordy will make a good sojer," said McDermott. "He is a good man of his fists."

"The Irish is all good sojers," said Mr. O'Toole, sententiously. "There was that man Dinnis, now, that was in all av the papers."

"I did not hear av him," said McDermott. "An' phwat did he do?"

"He licked th' entire German army wan mornin'," said O'Toole, "an' saved England, an' the Quane of France kissed him for it. 'Twas in all the papers. Or, maybe," said Mr. O'Toole, "it was the King av Belg'um kissed him for ut. Annyway wan of thim foreign powers kissed him wid the whole world lookin' on."

"An' phwat did this Dinnis do thin?" asked McDermott.

"He attimpted to assault the person that kissed

him," said O'Toole. "Maybe 'twas the King av Italy. 'Twas in all the papers at th' time. Some wan told me ye were in France y'rsilf, Paddy."

"I was that," said McDermott. "I wint wid mules."

"Did ye see annything av the war?"

"I did not," said McDermott. "Divil a bit of ut, barrin' a lot o' racket an' a big roarin' divil av a stame-boiler thing that come bustin' through th' air an' took away the mules that was me passport. But I come near seein' some av ut, wan time."

"An' how was it that ye come near it, an' missed it?" inquired Tim.

"I wint to slape," said McDermott. "The war was slapin', an' I laid m'silf down b' the side av ut an' took a nap, too. Later, I woke up in the hospital, some wan havin' stipped on me whilst I was slapin', or somethin' . They was afther keepin' me in th' hospital indefinite, an' I slipped away wan mornin', dodgin' the orderlies an' nurses, or I might have been there yet eatin' jelly an' gettin' me face washed f'r me. An' afther I got back here I thried to jine that war, but th' Amurrican Army w'u'd not have me."

"And phwy not?"

"Because av me fut."

"And how did ye hurt y'r fut?"

"Divil a bit do I know how," said McDermott. "I'm tellin' ye 'twas done whilst I was aslape. I remimber gettin' soused in wan av thim Frinch barrooms, an' I w'u'd think it was a mule stipped

on me fut whin I was slapin' off me souse, excipt that thim mules was gone before I got me souse."

"An' ye saw naught av the war?" Tim was distinctly disappointed.

"But little of ut, but little of ut," said McDermott. "But, Timmy,—wan thing I did whilst I was in France."

"An' phwat was that?"

"I avened up an ould grudge," said McDermott. He put away a second drink, rolling it over his tongue with satisfaction. "Do ye mind that Goostave Schmidt that used to kape bar acrost the strate? Ye do! Do ye mind th' time he hit me wid th' bung starter? Ye do!"

"Phwat thin?"

"Well, thin," said McDermott, "I met up wid him ag'in in wan av thim Frinch barrooms. I do not remimber phwat he said to me nor phwat I said to him, for I was soused, Timmy. But wan word led to another, an' I give him as good as he sint, an' 'twas wid a bung starter, too. I brung it back wid me as a sooveneer av me travels in France."

And, undoing his brown paper bundle, McDermott fished forth from among his change of socks and shirts and underwear the bung starter of the Hôtel Fauçon and laid it upon the bar for his friend's inspection. Something else in the bundle caught O'Toole's eye.

"An' phwat is that thing ye have there?" asked Tim.

"Divil a bit do I know phwat," said McDermott, picking the article up and tossing it carelessly upon the bar. " 'Twas layin' by me cot in the hospital, along wid m' bung starter an' me clothes whin I come to m'silf, an' whin I made me sneak from that place I brung it along."

It was the *Croix de Guerre.*

V.—Looney the Mutt

V.—Looney the Mutt

LOONEY had but one object in life, one thought, one conscious motive of existence—to find Slim again. After he found Slim, things would be different, things would be better, somehow. Just how, Looney did not know.

Looney did not know much, anyhow. Likely he would never have known much, in the most favorable circumstances. And the circumstances under which he had passed his life were scarcely conducive to mental growth. He could remember, vaguely, that he had not always been called Looney Hogan. There had been a time when he was called Kid Hogan. Something had happened inside his head one day, and then there had come a period of which he remembered nothing at all; after that, when he could remember again, he was not Kid any more, but Looney. Perhaps some one had hit him on the head. People were always hitting him, before he knew Slim. And now that Slim was gone, people were always hitting him again. When he was with Slim, Slim had not let people hit him—often. So he must find Slim again; Slim, who was the only God he had ever known.

In the course of time he became known, in his own queer world, from Baltimore to Seattle, from Los Angeles to Boston, as Slim's Lost Mutt, or as Looney the Mutt. Looney did not resent being called a dog, particularly, but he never called himself "The Mutt"; he stuck to "Looney"; Slim had called him Looney, and Looney must, therefore, be right.

The humors of Looney's world are not, uniformly, kindly humors. Giving Looney the Mutt a "bum steer" as to Slim's whereabouts was considered a legitimate jest.

"Youse ain't seen Slim Matchett anywheres?" he would ask of hobo or wobbly, working stiff or yeggman, his faded pale-blue eyes peering from his weather-worn face with the same anxious intensity, the same eager hope, as if he had not asked the question ten thousand times before.

And the other wanderer, if he were one that knew of Looney the Mutt and Looney's quest would answer, like as not:

"Slimmy de Match? Uh-huh! I seen Slim last mont' in Chi. He's lookin' fer youse, Looney."

One day the Burlington Crip, who lacked a hand, and who looked so mean that it was of common report that he had got sore at himself and bitten it off, varied the reply a bit by saying:

"I seen Slim las' week, an' he says: 'Where t' hell's dat kid o' mine? Youse ain't seen nuttin' o' dat kid o' mine, has you, Crip? Dat kid o' mine give me de slip, Crip. He lammistered, and I ain't

seen him since. If youse gets yer lamps on dat kid o' mine, Crip, give him a wallop on his mush fer me, an' tell him to come an' find me an' I'm gonna give him another one.' "

Looney stared and wondered and grieved. It hurt him especially that Slim should think that he, Looney, had run away from Slim; he agonized anew that he could not tell Slim at once that such was not the truth. And he wondered and grieved at the change that must have taken place in Slim, who now promised him "a wallop on the mush." For Slim had never struck him. It was Slim who had always kept other people from striking him. It was Slim who had, upon occasion, struck other people to protect him—once, in a hangout among the lakeside sand dunes south of Chicago, Slim had knifed a man who had, by way of jovial by-play to enliven a dull afternoon, flung Looney into the fire.

It never occurred to Looney to doubt, entirely, these bearers of misinformation. He was hunting Slim, and of course, he thought, Slim was hunting Looney. His nature was all credulity. Such mind as the boy possessed—he was somewhere in his twenties, but had the physique of a boy—was saturated with belief in Slim, with faith in Slim, and he thought that all the world must admire Slim. He did not see why any one should tell lies that might increase Slim's difficulties, or his own.

There was a big red star he used to look at

nights, when he slept in the open, and because it seemed to him bigger and better and more splendid than any of the other stars he took to calling it Slim's star. It was a cocky, confident-looking star; it looked as if it would know how to take care of itself, and Slim had been like that. It looked good-natured, too, and Slim had been that way. When Looney had rustled the scoffin's for Slim, Slim had always let him have some of the best chow—or almost always. And he used to talk to that star about Slim when he was alone. It seemed sympathetic. And although be believed the hoboes were telling him the truth when they said that they had seen Slim, it was apparent even to his intelligence that they had no real sympathy with his quest.

Once he did find a certain sympathy, if no great understanding. He worked a week, one Spring, for a farmer in Indiana. The farmer wished to keep him, for that Summer at least, for Looney was docile, willing enough, and had a natural, unconscious tact with the work-horses. Looney was never afraid of animals, and they were never afraid of him. Dogs took to him, and the instant liking of dogs had often stood him in good stead in his profession.

"Why won't you stay?" asked the farmer.

"Slim's lookin' fer me, somewheres," said Looney. And he told the farmer about Slim. The farmer, having perceived Looney's mental twilight, and feeling kindly toward the creature, ad-

vanced an argument that he thought might hold him.

"Slim is just as likely to find you if you stay in one place, as if you go travelin' all over the country," he said.

"Huh-uh," said Looney. "He ain't, Mister. It's this way, Mister: every time I stop long anywheres, Slim, he passes me by."

And then he continued, after a pause: "Slim, he was always good to me, Mister. I kinda want to be the one that finds Slim, instead of just stayin' still an' waitin' to be found."

They were standing in the dusk by the barn, and the early stars were out. Looney told him about Slim's star.

"I want to be the guy that does the findin'," went on Looney presently, "because I was the guy that done the losin'. One night they was five or six of us layin' under a lot of railroad ties we had propped up against a fence to keep the weather off, an' we figgered on hoppin' a train fer Chi that night. Well, the train comes along, but I'm asleep. See? The rest of t' gang gits into an empty in de dark, an' I don't wake up. I s'pose Slim he t'inks I'm wit' t' gang, but I don't wake up under them ties till mornin'. I went to Chi soon's I could, but I ain't never glommed him since, Mister. I didn't find him dere. An' dat's t' way I lost Slim, Mister."

"Maybe," suggested the farmer, "he is dead."

"Nit," said Looney. "He ain't dead. If Slim

was croaked or anything, I'd be wised up to it. Look at that there star. Dat is Slim's star, like I told youse. If Slim had been bumped off, or anything, Mister, that star wouldn't be shinin' that way, Mister."

And he went back to his own world—his world—which was a succession of freight and cattle cars, ruinous sheds and shelters in dubious suburbs near to railroad sidings, police stations, workhouses, jails, city missions, transient hangouts in bedraggled clumps of wood, improvised shacks, shared with others of his kind in vacant lots in sooty industrial towns, chance bivouacs amidst lumber piles and under dripping water tanks, lucky infrequent lodgings in slum hotels that used to charge fifteen cents for a bed and now charge a quarter, golden moments in vile barrooms and blind tigers, occasional orgies in quarries or gravel pits or abandoned tin-roofed tool houses, uneasy loiterings and interrupted slumbers in urban parks and the squares or outskirts of villages. Sometimes he worked, as he had with the Indiana farmer, with the wheat harvesters of the Northwest, or the snow shovelers of the metropoli, or the fruit gatherers of California; but more often he loafed, and rustled grub and small coin from the charitably disposed.

It all seemed the natural way of life to Looney. He could not remember anything else. He viewed the people of the world who did not live so, and whom he saw to be the majority, as strange, unac-

countable beings whom he could never hope to understand; he vaguely perceived that they were stronger than he and his ever-hiking clan, and he knew that they might do unpleasant things to him with their laws and their courts and their strength, but he bore them no rancor, unlike many of his associates.

He had no theories about work or idleness; he accepted either as it came; he had little conscious thought about anything, except finding Slim again. And one thing worried him: Slim, who was supposed to be looking for Looney, even as Looney was looking for Slim, left no mark. He was forever looking for it, searching for the traces of Slim's knife—a name, a date, a destination, a message bidding Looney to follow or to wait—on freight sheds and water tanks, and known and charted telegraph poles and the tool houses of construction gangs. But Slim, always just ahead of him, as he thought, continually returning and passing him, ever receding in the distance, left no mark, no wanderer's pateran, behind. Looney left his own marks everywhere, but, strangely enough, it seemed that Slim never saw them. Looney remembered that one time when he and Slim were together Slim had wished to meet and confer with the Burlington Crip, and had left word to that effect, penciled and carved and sown by the speech of the mouth, from the Barbary Coast to the Erie Basin. And the Burlington Crip, with his snaggle teeth and his stump where a hand had

been, had joined them on the Brooklyn waterfront within two months. It had been simple, and Looney wondered why Slim omitted this easy method of communication. Perhaps Slim was using it and Looney was not finding the marks. He knew himself for stupid, and set his failure down to that, never to neglect on Slim's part. For Slim was Slim, and Slim could do no wrong.

His habit of searching for some scratched or written word of Slim's became known to his whole section of the underworld, and furnished material for an elaboration of the standing jest at his expense. When ennui descended upon some chance gathering in one of the transient hangouts—caravanserai as familiar to the loose-foot, casual guests, from coast to coast, as was ever the Blackstone in Chicago or the Biltmore in New York to those who read this simple history—it was customary for some wag to say:

"Looney, I seen a mark that looked like Slim's mark on a shed down in Alexandria, Virginny, right by where the Long Bridge starts over to Washington."

And it might be that Looney would start at once, without a word, for Alexandria. Therein lay the cream of this subtle witticism, for its perpetrators—in Looney's swift departures.

Or it might be that Looney would sit and ponder, his washed-out eyes interrogating the speaker in a puzzled fashion, but never doubting. And then the jester would say, perhaps: "Why don't

you get a move onto you, Looney? You're gonna miss Slim again."

And Looney would answer, perchance: "Slim, he ain't there now. The' was one of them wobblies' bump-off men sayin' he seen Slim in Tacoma two weeks ago, an' Slim was headin' this way. I'm gonna wait fer him a while longer."

But he never waited long. He could never make himself. As he had told the Indiana farmer, he was afraid to wait long. It was the Burlington Crip who had made him afraid to do that. The Crip had told him one time: "Looney, Slim went through here last night, while youse was asleep over on that lumber pile. I forgets youse is lookin' fer him or I'd a tipped him off youse was here."

Slim had been within a hundred yards of him, and he had been asleep and had never known! What would Slim think, if he knew that? So thereafter he was continually tortured by the fancy that Slim might be passing him in the night; or that Slim, while he himself was riding the rods underneath a railway car, might be on the blind baggage of that very train, and would hop off first and be missed again. From day to day he became more muddled and perplexed trying to decide whether it would be better to choose this route or that, whether it would be better to stop here a week, or go yonder with all possible speed. And from month to month he developed more and more the questing, peering, wavering manner of the lost dog that seeks its master.

Looney was always welcome in the hang-outs of the wandering underworld. Not only was he a source of diversion, a convenient butt, but few could rustle grub so successfully. His meager frame and his wistfulness, his evident feebleness of intellect, drew alms from the solvent population, and Looney faithfully brought his takings to the hangouts and was dispatched again for more. Servant and butt he was to such lords as the Burlington Crip and the English Basher. But he did not mind so long as he was not physically maltreated—as he often was. The occasional crimes of his associates, the occasional connection of some of them with industrial warfare here and there, Looney sometimes participated in; but he never understood. If he were told to do so and so, for the most part he did it. If he were asked to do too much, or was beaten up for his stupidity, and he was always stupid, he quietly slunk away at his first opportunity.

The English Basher was a red-faced savage with fists as hard and rough as tarred rope; and he conceived the idea that Looney should be his kid, and wait upon him, even as he had been Slim's kid. Looney, afraid of the man, for a time seemed to acquiesce. But the Basher had reckoned without Looney's faculty for blundering.

He dispatched Looney one day, ostensibly to bum a handout, but in reality to get the lay of a certain house in a suburb near Cincinnati, which the Basher meditated cracking the next convenient

night. Looney returned with the food but without the information. He had been willing enough, for he admired yeggmen and all their ways and works, and was withheld by no moral considerations from anything he was asked to do; but he had bungled. He had been in the kitchen, he had eaten his own scoffin's there, he had talked with the cook for twenty minutes, he had even brought up from the cellar a scuttle of coal for the kitchen range to save the cook's back, but he actually knew less about that house, its plan, its fastenings, its doors and basement windows than the Basher had been able to gather with a single stroke of the eye as he loitered down the street.

"Cripes! Whadje chin about with the kitchen mechanic all dat time, you?" demanded the Basher.

"She was stringin' me along," said Looney humbly, "an' I spilled to her about me an' Slim."

"Slim! —— —— yer, I've a mind t' croak yer!" cried the Basher.

And he nearly did it, knocking the boy down repeatedly, till finally Looney lay still upon the ground.

" 'S'elp me," said the Basher, "I've a mind to give yer m' boots! You get up an' beat it! An' if I ever gets my lamps onto you again I *will* croak you, by Gawd, an' no mistake!"

Looney staggered to his feet and hobbled to a safe distance. And then, spitting out a broken tooth, he dared to mutter: "If Slimmy was here,

he'd see de color o' youse insides, Slimmy would. Slimmy, he knifed a yegg oncet wot done less'n dat t'me!"

It was only a week or two after he left the Basher that Looney's faith in Slim's star was tested again. Half a dozen of the brotherhood were gathered about a fire in a gravel pit in northern Illinois, swapping yarns and experiences and making merry. It was a tremendous fire, and lighted up the hollow as if it were the entrance to Gehenna, flinging the grotesque shadows of the men against the overhanging embankments, and causing the inhabitants of a village a mile or so away to wonder what farmer's haystack was aflame. The tramps were wasting five times the wood they needed, after their fashion. They had eaten to repletion, and they were wasting the left-over food from their evening gorge; they had booze; they were smoking; they felt, for the hour, at peace with the world.

"Wot ever *did* become of dat Slim?" asked the Burlington Crip, who happened to be of the party, looking speculatively at Looney. Even the sinister Crip, for the nonce, was not toting with him his usual mordant grouch.

Looney was tending the fire, while he listened to tales of the spacious days of the great Johnny Yegg himself, and other Titans of the road who have now assumed the state of legendary heroes; and he was, as usual, saying nothing.

"Slim? Slimmy t' Match wot Looney here's

been tailin' after fer so long?" said the San Diego Kid. "Slim, he was bumped off in Paterson t'ree or four years ago."

"He wasn't neither," spoke up Looney. "Tex, here, seen him in Chi last mont'."

And, indeed, Tex had told Looney so. But now, thus directly appealed to, Tex answered nothing. And for the first time Looney began to get the vague suspicion that these, his friends, might have trifled with him before. Certainly they were serious now. He looked around the sprawled circle and sensed that their manner was somehow different from the attitude with which they had usually discussed his quest for Slim.

"Bumped off?" said Tex. "How?"

"A wobbly done it," said the San Diego Kid. "Slim, he was scabbin'. Strike-breakin'. And they was some wobblies there helpin' on the strike. See? An' this wobbly bumps Slim off."

"He didn't neither," said Looney again.

"T' hell he didn't? He said he did," said the San Diego Kid pacifically. "Is a guy gonna say he's bumped off a guy unless he's bumped him off?"

Looney, somewhat shaken, withdrew from the group to seek comfort from the constellations; and particularly from that big, red star, the apparent king of stars, which he had come to think of as Slim's star, and vaguely, as Slim's mascot. It was brighter and redder than ever that night, Looney thought, and sitting on a discarded rail-

road tie and staring at the planet, Looney gradually recovered his faith.

"He ain't neither been bumped off, Slim ain't," he muttered, "an' I'm gonna find him yet."

And Slim had not been bumped off, however sincere the San Diego Kid may have been in his belief.

It was some months later that Looney did find him in a little city in Pennsylvania—or found some one that looked like him.

Looney had dropped from a freight train early in the morning, had rustled himself some grub, had eaten two good meals and had part of a day's sleep, and now, just as dark was coming on, and the street lamps were being lighted, was loafing aimlessly on the platform of the railway depot. He purposed to take a train south that night, when it became so dark that he could crawl into an empty in the yards without too much danger of being seen and he was merely putting in the time until full night came on.

While he was standing idly so, an automobile drew up beside the station platform and an elegantly dressed and slender man of about thirty got out. He assisted from the car a woman and a small child, and they made toward the door of the waiting room.

"Slim!" cried Looney, rushing forward.

For this was Slim—it must be Slim—it was Slimmy the Match in every feature—and yet, the

car!—the clothes—the woman—the baby—the prosperity—— *Was* it Slim?

"Slim!" cried Looney again, his heart leaping in his meager body. "It's me, Slim! It's Looney! I've got youse again, Slim! Gawd! I've found yuh!"

The woman hastily snatched the child up into her arms, with a suppressed scream, and recoiled.

The man made no sound, but he, too, drew back a step, not seeming to see Looney's outstretched hand.

But he did see it—he saw more than that. He saw, as if they were flashed before him at lightning speed upon a cinema screen, a dozen scenes of a wild and reckless and indigent youth that he had thought was dead forever; he saw these rough-neck years suddenly leap alive and stalk toward him again, toward him and his; he saw his later years of industry, his hard-won success, his position so strenuously battled for, his respectability that was become so dear to him, all his house of life so laboriously builded, crumbling before the touch of this torn and grotesque outcast that confronted and claimed him, this wavering, dusty lunatic whom he dimly remembered. If his wife knew—if her people knew—if the business men of this town were to know——

He shuddered and turned sick, and then with a sudden recovery he took his child from its mother and guided her before him into the waiting room.

Looney watched them enter, in silence. He stood dazed for a moment, and then he slowly turned and walked down the railroad track beyond the limits of the town. There, upon a spot of turf beside the right of way, he threw himself upon his face and sobbed and moaned, as a broken-hearted child sobs, as a dog moans upon its master's grave.

But after a while he looked up. Slim's star was looking down at him, red and confident and heartening as ever. He gazed at it a long time, and then an idea took form in his ruined brain and he said aloud:

"Now, dat wasn't *really* Slim! I been lookin' fer Slim so long I t'ink I see Slim where he ain't! Dat was jus' some guy wot looks like Slimmy. Slimmy, he wouldn't never of gone back on an old pal like dat!"

The rumble of an approaching train caught his ears. He got to his feet and prepared to board it.

"Slim, he's waitin' fer me somewheres," he told the star. "I may be kinda looney about some t'ings, but I knows Slim, an' dey ain't no yellow streak nowheres in Slim!"

And with unshaken loyalty Looney the Mutt boarded the train and set off upon his endless quest anew.

VI.—Kale

VI.—Kale

"SEE that old fellow there?" asked Ed the waiter. "Well, his fad is money."

The old fellow indicated—he must have been nearly eighty—sat eating corned beef and cabbage in a little booth in a certain delightful, greasy old chophouse in downtown New York. It was nearly time to close the chophouse for that day for it was almost eleven o'clock at night; it was nearly time to close the chophouse forever, for it was the middle of June, 1919. In a couple of weeks the wartime prohibition act would be in force, and Ed and I had been discussing what effect it would have upon our respective lives.

There was no one else in the place at the time except the cashier and the old man whose fad was money, and so Ed had condescended toward me, as a faithful customer, and was sitting down to have a drink with me.

"His fad is money?" I questioned, glancing at the old gentleman, who seemed to be nothing extraordinary as regards face or manner or attire. He had a long, bony New Englandish head and a short, white, well-trimmed beard; he was finishing his nowise delicate food with gusto. "I should

say," I added, "that his fad was corned beef and cabbage."

"That's one of his fads," admitted Ed the waiter, "and I don't know but that it's as strong in him as his money fad. At any rate, I've never seen him without one or the other was near him, and both in large quantities."

We had been conversing in a mumble, so that our voices should not carry to the old gentleman. And now Ed dropped his voice still lower and whispered:

"That's Old Man Singleton."

I looked at him with a renewed interest. Every one knew who Old Man Singleton was, and many persons liked to guess how much he was worth. Ostensibly he had retired, leaving to his two sons the management of the Singleton banking business, with its many ramifications; but actually he kept his interest in the concern and was reputed to be coaching his grandsons in the ways of the world, and especially that part of the world known as "The Street."

Starting out as a New England villager who hated poverty because his family had always known it, he had come to New York as a lad of twenty, with red knitted mittens on his osseous hands, and he had at once removed the mittens and put the hands to work gathering money; it was rumored that the hands had never turned loose any of the garnered coin; it was even said by some persons that he still had the same pair of mittens.

The details of his rise I cannot give; he had achieved his ambition to be one of the very rich men of America because the ambition was so strong within him.

"Of course his fad is money," I muttered to Ed the waiter. "Everybody knows that Old Man Singleton's fad is money."

Ed was about to reply, when Mr. Singleton looked up and motioned for his check. Ed brought it, and gave the old gentleman his hat and his stick and his change.

"I hope everything was all right, Mr. Singleton," said Ed, palpably bidding for recognition and a tip.

"Eh?" said Singleton, looking blankly at Ed. "You know me, hey? I don't recall you. Yes, everything was all right, thank you." He gave the waiter a dime and passed out, after another blank, fumbling look at Ed, and a shake of his head. There was something feeble and wandering in the old fellow's manner; his memory was going; it was obvious that before long the rest of him would follow his memory.

"He shouldn't be allowed to go around this way alone at night," murmured Ed, watching the door through which he had made his exit. "But I suppose he's as bull-headed as ever about doing what he pleases, even if his legs are shaky."

"He didn't know you," I hinted, for I wished to learn all that Ed knew about Old Man Singleton.

Ed is a person who has been in the world nearly fifty years; he has had some very unusual acquaintances and experiences. It is never safe to predict just what Ed will know and what he will not know. One afternoon, after I had known Ed for about a year, I was attempting to argue some scientific point with a friend who was lunching with me, and Ed, who was waiting on us and listening, remarked: "I beg your pardon, sir, but it wasn't in *The Descent of Man* that Darwin said that; it was in *The Origin of Species.*"

And yet, if you deduce from that remark that Ed knows a great deal about modern science, you will be mistaken; as likely as not he could quote pages of Marcus Aurelius to you, and at the same time he might pronounce "Euripides" as if the last two syllables were one, riming with "hides"; his reading, like his life, has been elective.

"He doesn't recall you," I repeated.

"And that's ingratitude," said Ed, "if he only knew it. I saved the old man's life once."

And Ed limped over to the table and resumed his seat opposite me. He has a bullet under one kneecap, and at times it makes him very lame. He would never tell me how it came there; to this day I do not know.

"From what did you save his life?" I asked.

"From a man," said Ed moodily. "From a man who had a notion to bean him one night. And to this day I ask myself: 'Did I do right, or did I do wrong?' "

"Tell me about it," I insisted.

"Drink up," said Ed, manipulating the Scotch bottle and the siphon of seltzer. "This is one of the last highballs you'll ever have, unless you sneak around and take it on the sly. I don't know that I should have another one myself; it settles in this damned knee of mine if I get a little too much."

"Tell me when, where and how you knew Old Man Singleton," I demanded again.

"This knee of mine," went on Ed, disregarding me, "is a hell of a handicap. We were talking about prohibition—what's prohibition going to do to me? Hey? It puts me out of a job in a barroom like this the first thing. And what else can I do? With this game leg, you can see me going on the stage as a Russian dancer, can't you? Or digging trenches to lay gas pipes in, or carrying a hod? Huh? And I can't even get a job in a swell restaurant uptown; they don't want any game-legged waiters sticking around, falling over the chairs. This was about the only kind of a joint and the only kind of a job I was fit for, this chop-house thing down here, and it's going to close in two weeks. What then? Be somebody's housemaid? I can't see it. I don't wish anybody any bad luck, but I hope the guy that put over this prohibition thing gets stiff in all his joints and lives forever."

I sympathized and waited, and finally he began.

"Old Man Singleton's fad," said Ed, "as I re-

marked before, is money. And as you remarked, another of his fads is corned beef and cabbage—especially cabbage. He will eat corned beef with his cabbage, and like it; or he will eat pork with his cabbage, and like it; or he will eat cabbage without either; it is the cabbage he likes—or kale. In fact, you could reduce his two fads to one, and say what he likes is kale—kale in the slang sense of money, and kale that is cabbage. And all his life he has been stuffing himself with kale.

"His fad is kale that he can see and feel and handle and show and carry about with him. Not merely money in the bank and stocks and bonds and property and real estate, but actual cash. He likes to carry it with him, and he does carry it with him. I guess he likes the feel of it in his billfolder, and the thought that he has got it on him—on him, the poor boy that came out of New England with the red knitted mittens on that everybody has heard so much about. I can understand the way he feels about it; with a folder full of thousand-dollar and ten-thousand-dollar bills he feels safe, somehow; feels like he'll never have to go back to that little New England town and saw cordwood and shovel snow again.

"He's got it on him now, that folder, and I'll bet you on it. That's what I meant when I said it wasn't safe for him to be trotting about this way after night. For if I know it, it stands to reason others know it, too.

"What you want to know is, how I know it.

Well, I was not always what I am now. Once I was quite a bird and wore dress suits and went to the Metropolitan Opera and listened to Caruso as he jumped his voice from peak to peak. Yes, sir, I know every darned acoustic in that place! They weren't my dress suits that I wore, but they fit me. Once I moved in the circles of the idle rich, though they didn't know it, and helped 'em spend the unearned increment they wrung from the toil of the downtrodden laboring man.

"Once, to come down to brass tacks, I was a butler's companion. It is an office you won't find listed in the social directory, but it existed, for me at least. The butler in the case was a good friend of mine by the name of Larry Hodgkins, and being part Irish, he was an ideal English butler. Larry and his mother were in the employ of the Hergsheimers, a wealthy Jewish family—you know who they are if you read the financial pages or the Sunday supplements. Mrs. Hodgkins was the housekeeper and Larry was the butler, and when the Hergsheimers were traveling Larry and his mother stayed in the New York house as caretakers and kept things shipshape. And let me give you a tip, by the way: if you ever take a notion to quit the writing game and go into domestic service, plant yourself with a rich Hebrew family. They want things done right, but they are the most liberal people on earth, especially to Gentile servants.

"This Hergsheimer was Jacob Hergsheimer,

and he was in right socially in New York, as well as financially; he had put himself across into the big time socially because, if you ask me, he belonged there; all the Hergsheimers didn't get across, but this one did. His New York house is uptown, between the sixties and the eighties, east of the Park, and he wants it kept so he can drop into it with his family and a flock of servants at any hour of the day or night, from any part of the earth, without a minute's notice, and give a dinner party at once, if he feels like it, and he frequently feels like it.

"It was Mrs. Hodgkins's and Larry's job to keep the fire from going out in the boilers, so to speak, and a head of steam on, so that the domestic ship could sail in any direction on receipt of orders by wire, wireless or telephone. They were permanent there, but Jake Hergsheimer and his family, as far as I could make out, never got more than an average of about three months' use a year out of that mansion.

"This time I am speaking of was nearly ten years ago. I was a waiter in an uptown restaurant, and both my legs were good then; Larry and I were old pals. The Jake Hergsheimers were sailing around the world in a yacht, and would be at it for about a year, as far as Larry knew, and he asked me up to live with him. I accepted; and believe me, the eight months I put in as Jake Hergsheimer's guest were *some* eight months. Not that Jake knew about it; but if he had known

it, he wouldn't have cared. This Jake was a real human being.

"And his clothes fit me; just as if I had been measured for them. He had what you might call an automatic tailor, Jake did. Every six weeks, rain or shine, that tailor delivered a new suit of clothes to the Hergsheimer house, and he sent in his bill once a year, so Larry the butler told me. Some people go away and forget to stop the milk; and when Jake sailed for the other side of the world he forgot to tell anybody to stop the tailor. Larry didn't feel as if it were any part of his duty to stop him; for Larry liked that tailor. He made Larry's clothes, too.

"And I didn't see where it was up to me to protest. As I said, Jake's garments might have been made for me. In fact, a great many of them *were* made for me. There were at least fifteen suits of clothes that had never been worn in that house, made to my measure and Jake's, when I became butler's companion in the establishment, and they kept right on coming. Also, there was a standing order for orchestra seats at the Metropolitan. Jake had a box every second Thursday, or something like that, but when he really wanted to hear the music and see the show he usually sat in the orchestra. Not only did his business suits fit me, but his dress clothes fit me, too.

"I used to go often, with a lady's maid that had the same access to clothing as I did. She was part of a caretaking staff also. Being a writing person,

you have, of course, only viewed New York's society and near-society from the outside, and no doubt you have been intimidated by the haughty manners of the servants. Well, when you get close to swells and really know them personally, you will find they are human, too.

"A butler on duty is a swelled-up proposition, because he has to be that way. But take him as you find him among his peers, and he quits acting like the Duke of Westminster Abbey, and is real sociable. This Larry person, for instance, could distend himself like a poisoned pup and make a timid millionaire feel like the sleeves of his undershirt must be showing below his cuffs; but in our little select circle Larry was the life of the party.

"Being, as I said before, an outsider, you likely don't realize how many of those big swell millionaires' cribs uptown are in the hands of caretakers like Larry and his mother and me the best part of the year. Well, they are; and there's a social life goes on in them that don't ever get into the papers. The parties we had that year in Jake's house would have done Jake himself good, if Jake could have got an invitation to them. But Jake was absent, though his cellar and his grocers were at our service; and he never questioned a bill, Larry said. There were twelve or fifteen hand-picked servants in our little social circle that year, and before I left there I could begin to understand how these débutantes feel at the end of the season—sort of

tired and bored and willing to relax and go in for work and rest and athletics for a change.

"I had only been butler's companion for a few weeks when Old Man Singleton dropped in one evening—yes, sir, Old Lemuel Singleton himself. He came to see the butler's mother, Mrs. Hodgkins. He had known her a good many years before, when he was wearing those red mittens and sawing wood up in that New England town and she was somebody's Irish cook. And he had run across her again, after he became a millionaire, down here in New York City. He was tickled to see her, and he didn't care a darn if she was Jake Hergsheimer's housekeeper. She could cook cabbage and kale better than any one else in the world, and he used to come and sit with her, and talk about that little old town up there, and indulge in his favorite dissipation.

"Old Man Singleton has had what you call the social entrée in New York for a good many years; for so long that some of his children, and all his grandchildren, were born with it. But he never took it very seriously himself. He has been an in-and-outer, you might say. If he saw Mrs. Hodgkins around Jake's house, he would call her Mary and ask her how folks were up home in front of Jake and his wife and a whole bunch of guests, just as soon as not.

"And his sons and his daughters and his grandchildren never could get him out of those ways; he always was bull-headed about doing what he

pleased, so Mrs. Hodgkins told me, and he always will be. And the old lady liked to see him and chin with him and cook for him; and believe me, she was some cook when she set herself to it. Not merely kale, but everything. She didn't cook for the Hergsheimers—they had a chef for that—but they missed it by not having her. Victuals was old Mary's middle name, and she could rustle up some of the best grub you ever threw your lip over.

"At first, Old Man Singleton and Mrs. Hodgkins didn't mix much with us younger folks when we pulled a party. It wasn't that we were too aristocratic for them, for off duty, as I said before, butlers and other swells can be as easy and jolly as common people. But they seemed too antiquated, if you get me; they were living too much in the past.

"And then, one night, I discovered what Old Man Singleton's fad was—kale. Money. Big money. Big money on his person. It was this way: Larry and I wanted to go downtown and have a little fun, but neither of us had any cash in hand. Larry had a check for one hundred and fifty dollars which Jake Hergsheimer had sent him, but all the tradesmen we knew were closed at that hour, and there wasn't any way to cash it, unless Old Man Singleton could.

" 'Mr. Singleton,' says Larry to the old man, who was sitting down to a mess of pork and kale

with Mrs. Hodgkins, 'maybe you can cash this for me.' And he handed him the check.

"The old man stopped eating and put his glasses on and pulled a billfolder out of his pocket, with a kind of pleased smile on his face.

" 'Let me see,' he says, taking out the bills, and running them over with his fingers; 'let me see.'

"I nearly dropped dead. There wasn't a bill in there of lower denomination than one thousand dollars; and most of them were ten-thousand-dollar bills.

" 'No, Larry,' says the old man, 'I'm afraid I can't, afraid I can't—haven't got the change.'

"And while we stood there and looked, he smoothed and patted those bills, and folded and refolded them, and then put them back into his pocket, and patted the pocket.

" 'Mary,' he says to the old woman with a grin, 'that's quite a lot of money for little Lem Singleton to be carrying around in his pocket, isn't it?'

" 'It is that, Lemuel,' said the old lady, 'and I should think you'd be afraid of leaving it out of the bank.'

" 'Well, Mary,' says the old man, 'I kind o' like to have it around me all the time—uh—huh! a little bit where I can put my hands on it, all the time. I used to carry gold; but I gave that up; it's too heavy, for what it's worth. But I like it, Mary; I used to look at that gold and say to myself, "Well, there's one thing you got, Lem Singleton, they never thought you'd get when you left

home! And they aren't going to take it away from you, either!" It was a long time before I could make paper seem as real to me as gold. But it does now.'

"And what does the old bird do but take it out of his pocket again and crinkle it through his fingers and smooth it out again and pet it and do everything but kiss it. Larry and I stood looking at him with our eyes sticking out, and he looked at us and laughed. It came to me all of a sudden that he liked to come where we servants were because he could pull that kind of thing in front of us, but that he was sort of lost among the swell-society bunch because he didn't dare pull it there and didn't feel so rich among them.

" 'My God, Larry,' I said, when we were outside the house, 'did you notice how much kale the old man had there?'

" 'Uh-huh,' said Larry. 'Mother always cooks a lot for him.'

" 'Wake up, Stupid,' I said. 'I don't mean cabbage. I mean money. There must have been nearly two hundred thousand dollars in that roll!'

" 'He always has around one hundred thousand dollars on him, at least,' says Larry. 'And I've seen him flash as high as a quarter of a million.'

" 'Well,' I says, 'something ought to be done about it.'

" 'What do you mean, Ed?' says he.

" 'Oh, nothing,' I said.

"We walked over to get the L train downtown,

saying nothing, and then finally Larry remarked:

" 'Electricity is a great thing, Ed.'

" 'I never said it wasn't,' says I.

" 'It's a great thing,' says Larry, 'but when you sit on it, sit on it right. For instance, I'd a darned sight rather sit in one of these electric trains than in that electric chair up at Sing Sing.'

" 'Who said anything about an electric chair?' I asked him.

" 'Nobody said anything,' says Larry, 'but you're thinking so darned loud I can get you.'

" 'Piffle, peanuts and petrification,' I said. 'Take care of your own thoughts, and I'll skim the fat off of mine myself.'

"Well, as I said, after that we got better acquainted, the old man and I. I paid more attention to him. He interested me more. I've always been interested in science of all kinds, and the year I spent in Jake Hergsheimer's house I cut the leaves of a lot of books in his library and gave them the once over. I was always interested in psychology, even before the word got to be a headliner in the Sunday supplements, and I took a good deal of pleasure that winter trying to get inside of Old Man Singleton's mind. I must say, I never got very far in, at that. My general conclusion at the end is what it was at the beginning—his fad is kale.

"And he loved to show it, you could see that. Not that he pulled it every time he happened to be at one of our parties. Often he would drop

in that winter from some swell social event at one of the big houses uptown, where he had been a guest, and eat some of old Mary's chow, and never intimate by word or look that he had all that kale on him. And then again he'd come among us, diked out in the soup and fish, and flash the roll, for no other reason that I know except he enjoyed seeing us get the blind staggers, which we always did. And then he'd fuss with it and pet it and go into a dream over it, and wake up again and grin and talk about life with old Mary. And they agreed about life; you never heard two more moral persons exchange views. It was sometimes as good as a Sunday-school to listen to them for half an hour.

"One night, when they had been gassing for a while, they sort of got my goat, and I said to him:

" 'Mr. Singleton, does it ever strike you as a little peculiar that you should have so much money and so many other people, such as myself, none at all?'

" 'No, Ed,' he says. 'No, it doesn't. That's the Lord's way, Ed! Money is given as a sacred trust by the Lord to them that are best fitted to have and to hold.'

" 'Meaning,' I asked him, 'that if you were ever to let loose of any of it, it might work harm in the world?'

"He chewed over that for quite a while, as if he saw something personal in it, and he gave me a

ten-dollar bill for a Christmas present. He isn't as stingy as some people say he is; he just looks so stingy that if he was the most liberal man on earth he would get the reputation of being stingy.

"The lady's maid that I used to go to the opera with quit me a little while after Christmas. She and I were walking around the promenade between the acts one night at the Metropolitan and Larry was with us, when a fellow stopped Larry and spoke to him. I could see the guy looking at the girl and me as he and Larry talked. Later, Larry told me that it was one of Jake Hergsheimer's friends, and he had been a little bit surprised to see Larry at the opera all diked out, and he had wanted to know who the girl was.

"Well, anyhow, she never went to the opera with me after that; but a few weeks later I saw her at a cabaret with Jake's friend. It was a grief to me; but I got into some real trouble, or let it get into me, about the same time, and that helped take the sting off. I had once been married—but there's no use going into all that. Anyhow, when the marriage kind o' wore off, my own folks took my wife's side of the case and she went to live with them. My old dad was sick, and they needed money, and my wife wrote to me that she was willing to let bygones be bygones and accept some money from me, and that my parents felt the same way, and there was a kid, too, that my folks were bringing up.

"Well, I was desperate for some way to get

hold of some cash and send to them. In the end, I took one of Jake Hergsheimer's silver vases and hocked it and sent the money, and got it out of hock two or three months later; but in the meantime there was a spell when I was so hard pressed it looked to me like I would actually have to do something dishonest to get that money.

"One night, before Jake Hergsheimer came to my rescue and lent me that silver vase, if you want to call it that, I was sitting alone in the house thinking what a failure in life I was, and how rotten it was to have a wife and kid and parents all set against me, and drinking some of Jake's good booze, and getting more and more low in my mind, when there came a ring at the front doorbell. The butler was out, and old Mary was asleep way up in the top of the house, at the back, and wouldn't hear.

" 'I'll bet,' I said to myself, 'that's Old Man Singleton nosing around for his cabbage.' And I made up my mind I wouldn't let him in—he could ring till he froze to death on the front steps, and I wouldn't. It was a blustery, snowy January night, with new snow over the old ice underneath, and I says to myself, 'It's a wonder the old coot don't slip down and bust some of those big New England bones of his. And I wouldn't care much if he did.'

"But he kept on ringing, and finally I thought I'd better go and let him in. I didn't have any ulterior notions when I went up the stairs from the

servants' dining room and made for the front door. But the minute I clapped eyes on him I thought of all that kale in his pocket.

"I opened the front door, but outside of that was an iron grille. It had a number of fastenings, but the final one was a short, heavy iron bar that lay in two sockets, one on each side of the opening.

"I lifted the bar and swung the grille open.

" 'Ha! Hum!' said he, and sneezed. 'It's you, Ed, is it?'

"And, snuffing and sneezing, he passed in front of me.

"And as he passed by me that bar said something to my hand. And the hand raised up. It wasn't any of my doings, it was all the hand and the bar. It raised up, that bar did, right behind the old man's head. He stopped just outside the front door and flapped his big bony feet on a rug that was there, to get the snow off his shoes, and while he flapped and sneezed that bar was right over the old man's brain-box.

" 'Well,' I said to myself, 'here is your chance to be an honest man and a prosperous man, reunited with your wife and your kid and your folks at home, and not have to borrow anything from Jake Hergsheimer's collection—just one little tap on the old man's head, and down he goes, and he's got anywhere from one hundred thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in his clothes.'

" 'Yes,' said myself to me, 'one little tap, and

maybe you kill him. What then? The electric chair, huh?'

"'Hell!' I said to myself. 'Take a chance! The old man has so much money that what he has in his pocket means nothing to him one way or another. Larry's gone till morning, and the old woman won't wake for a long time. It means a little bit of a headache for Old Lemuel here, and it means your chance to lead an honest life hereafter and be a useful citizen and take care of those you have been neglecting.'

"'Yes,' said myself to me, 'it's more moral to do it, and make your life over, but you never have been one for morality in the past. Besides, you'd kill him.'

"And I might have killed him, boss. I wasn't sure of it then, but I've been sure of it since then. I was that strung up that I would have hit too hard.

"And yet, I might *not* have done so! I might have hit him just enough to put him out and make my get-away, and I might have led an honest life since then.

"But at the moment I couldn't do it. I saw, all of a sudden, something funny. I saw the old man stamping his feet and getting the snow off, and I thought of him as a dead man, and I says to myself: 'How damned funny for a dead man to stamp the snow off his feet!' And I laughed.

"'Heh? Heh? What did you say, Ed?' says the old man, and turns around.

"I dropped the iron bar to my side, and that dead man came up out of the grave.

" 'Nothing, Mr. Singleton,' I said. 'I was just going to say, go on in, and I'll get a brush and clean the snow off of you.'

"I said I saved his life from a man one time. Well, I was the man I saved his life from.

"He went on in, and I barred the grille and locked the door, and we went on down to the dining room. I was shaking, and still I wasn't easy in my mind. I told him there wasn't anybody home but me, and he said he'd take a drop of Jake's brandy. And while I was opening a bottle of it for him, what does he do but pull out that billfolder.

" 'For God's sake, Mr. Singleton,' I said, turning weak and sitting down in a chair all of a sudden, 'put that money up.'

"He sat there and sipped his brandy and talked, but I didn't hear what he was saying. I just looked at him, and kept saying to myself, should I have done it? Or should I have let him go by?

"Boss, that was nearly ten years ago, and I've been asking myself that question from time to time ever since. Should I have done it? Was it moral to refuse that chance to make my life over again? You know me, kid. You know some of me, at least. You know I don't hold much by morals. If I was to tell you how I got that bullet under my kneecap, you'd know me better than

you do. If I had hit him just right and made my get-away, I would have led a different life.

"And I wouldn't now be waiting for my death sentence. For that's practically what this prohibition thing means to me. I can't work at anything but this. And this is through with. And I'm through with. I'm a bum from now on. There's no use kidding myself; I'm a bum.

"And yet, often, I'm glad I didn't do it."

Ed brooded in silence for a while.

And then I said, "It's strange he didn't know you."

"It's been ten years," said Ed, "and you saw that the old man's got to the doddering stage. He likely wouldn't know his own children if he didn't see them every day or two."

"I suppose," I said, "that the old man feels he is ending his days in a very satisfactory manner—the national prohibition thing triumphant, and all that."

"How do you mean?" asked Ed.

"Don't you know?" I said. "Why, Old Man Singleton, it is said, helped to finance the fight, and used his money and his influence on other big money all over the country in getting next to doubtful politicians and putting the thing through the state legislatures. I don't mean there was anything crooked about it anywhere, but he was one of the bunch that represented organized power, and put the stunt across while the liquor interests

were still saying national prohibition could never come."

"The hell he did!" said Ed. "I didn't know he was mixed up with it. I never saw him take a drink, now that I remember, except the brandy on the night I saved his life."

"Old Man Singleton," I said, "is credited with having had more to do with it than any other one person, by those who are on the inside."

"The old coot!" said Ed. And then added wryly: "I hope he gets as stiff in his knee joint as I am and lives forever! He's made a bum of me!"

It was three or four weeks after my talk with Ed that I read in the papers of a peculiar accident of which Old Man Singleton had been the victim. A head of cabbage, he said, had fallen out of a tree and hit him on his own head one evening as he was walking alone in Central Park. He had been dazed by the blow for a moment; and when he regained his feet a considerable sum of money which he had been carrying was gone. He was sure that he had been struck by a head of cabbage, for a head of cabbage lay on the pathway near him when he was helped to his feet. He did not pretend to be able to say how a head of cabbage could have gotten into one of the park trees.

The police discredited his story, pointing out that likely the old man, who was near-sighted, had blundered against a tree in the dusk and struck his

head. The head of cabbage, they told the reporters, could have had nothing to do with it; it could not have come into contact with his head at all, unless, indeed, some one had put it into a sack and swung it on him like a bludgeon; and this, the police said, was too absurd to be considered. For why should a crook use a head of cabbage, when the same results might have been attained with the more usual blackjack, stick or fist?

Old Man Singleton was not badly hurt; and as regarded the loss of the money, he never said, nor did his family ever say, just how large the sum was. Mr. Singleton had the vague impression that after the cabbage fell out of the tree and hit him he had been helped to his feet by a man who limped and who said to him: "Kale is given to them that can best use it, to have and to hold."

He did not accuse this person, who disappeared before he was thoroughly himself again, of having found the money which had evidently dropped from his pocket when the cabbage fell from the tree and hit him, but he was suspicious, and he thought the police were taking the matter too lightly; he criticized the police in an interview given to the papers. The police pointed out the irrelevance of the alleged words of the alleged person who limped, and intimated that Mr. Singleton was irrational and should be kept at home evenings; as far as they were concerned, the incident was closed.

But I got another slant at it, as Ed might have

said. Last winter I was talking at my club with a friend just back from Cuba, where the rum is red and joy is unconfined.

"I met a friend of yours," he said, "by the name of Ed down there, who is running a barroom and seems to be quite a sport in his way. Sent his regards to you. Must have made it pay—seems to have all kinds of money. Named his barroom 'The Second Thought.' Asked him why. He said nobody knew but himself, and he was keeping it a secret—though you might guess. Wants you to come down. Sent you a message. Let's see: what was it? Oh, yes! Cryptic! Very cryptic! Wrote it down—here it is: *'Kale! Kale! The gang's all here.'* Make anything out of it? I can't."

I could, though I didn't tell him what. But I shall not visit Ed in Cuba; I consider him an immoral person.

VII.—Bubbles

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I

TOMMY HAWKINS was not so sober that you could tell it on him. Certainly his friend Jack Dobson, calling on him one dreary winter evening —an evening of that winter before John Barleycorn cried maudlin tears into his glass and kissed America good-by—would never have guessed it from Tommy's occupation. Presenting himself at Tommy's door and finding it unlocked, Jack had gone on in. A languid splashing guided him to the bathroom. In the tub sat Tommy with the water up to his shoulders, blowing soap bubbles.

"You darned old fool!" said Jack. "Aren't you ever going to grow up, Tommy?"

"Nope," said Tommy placidly. "What for?"

Sitting on a chair close by the bathtub was a shallow silver dish with a cake of soap and some reddish-colored suds in it. Tommy had bought the dish to give some one for a wedding present, and then had forgotten to send it.

"What makes the suds red?" asked Jack.

"I poured a lot of that nose-and-throat spray stuff into it," explained Tommy. "It makes them prettier. Look!"

As a pipe he was using a piece of hollow brass curtain rod six or eight inches long and of about the diameter of a fat lead pencil. He soused this thing in the reddish suds and manufactured a bubble with elaborate care. With a graceful gesture of his wet arm he gently waved the rod until the bubble detached itself. It floated in the air for a moment, and the thin, reddish integument caught the light from the electric globe and gave forth a brief answering flash as of fire. Then the bubble suddenly and whimsically dashed itself against the wall and was no more, leaving a faint, damp, reddish trace upon the white plaster.

"Air current caught it," elucidated Tommy with the air of a circus proprietor showing off pet elephants. In his most facetious moments Tommy was wont to hide his childish soul beneath an exterior of serious dignity. "This old dump is full of air currents. They come in round the windows, come in round the doors, come right in through the walls. Damned annoying, too, for a scientist making experiments with bubbles—starts a bubble and never knows which way it's going to jump. I'm gonna complain to the management of this hotel."

"You're going to come out of that bathtub and get into your duds," said Jack. "That water's getting cool now, and between cold water and air currents you'll have pneumonia the first thing you know—you poor silly fish, you."

"Speaking of fish," said Tommy elliptically,

"there's a bottle of cocktails on the mantel in the room there. Forgot it for a moment. Don't want to be inhospitable, but don't drink all of it."

"It's all gone," said Dobson a moment later.

"So?" said Tommy in surprise. "That's the way with cocktails. Here one minute and gone the next—like bubbles. Bubbles! Life's like that, Jack!" He made another bubble with great solemnity, watched it float and dart and burst. "Pouf!" he said. "Bubbles! Bubbles! Life's like that!"

"You're an original philosopher, you are," said Jack, seizing him by the shoulders. "You're about as original as a valentine. Douse yourself with cold water and rub yourself down and dress. Come out of it, kid, or you'll be sick."

"If I get sick," said Tommy, obeying, nevertheless, "I won't have to go to work to-morrow."

"Why aren't you working to-day?" asked his friend, working on him with a coarse towel.

"Day off," said Tommy.

"Day off!" rejoined Dobson. "Since when has the *Morning Despatch* been giving two days off a week to its reporters? You had your day off Tuesday, and this is Thursday."

"Is it?" said Tommy. "I always get Tuesday and Thursday mixed. Both begin with a T. Hey, Jack, how's that? Both begin with a T! End with a tea party! Good line, hey, Jack? Tuesday and Thursday both begin with a T and end

with a tea party. I'm gonna write a play round that, Jack. Broadway success! Letters a foot high! Royalties for both of us! I won't forget you, Jack! You suggested the idea for the plot, Jack. Drag you out in front of the curtain with me when I make my speech. 'Author! Author!' yells the crowd. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' says I, 'here is the obscure and humble person who set in motion the train of thought that led to my writing this masterpiece. Such as he is, I introduce him to you.' "

"Shut up!" said Jack, and continued to lacerate Tommy's hide with the rough towel. "Hold still! Now go and get into your clothes." And as Tommy began to dress he regarded that person darkly. "You're a brilliant wag, you are! It's a shame the way the copy readers down on the *Despatch* keep your best things out of print, you splattering supermudhen of journalism, you! You'll wake up some morning without any more job than a kaiser." And as Tommy threaded himself into the mystic maze of his garments Mr. Dobson continued to look at him and mutter disgustedly, "Bubbles!"

Not that he was afraid that Tommy would actually lose his job. If it had been possible for Tommy to lose his job that must have happened years before. But Tommy wrote a certain joyous type of story better than any other person in New York, and his facetiousness got him out of as many scrapes as it got him into. He was thirty years

old. At ninety he would still be experimenting with the visible world in a spirit of random eagerness, joshing everything in it, including himself. He looked exactly like the young gentleman pictured in a widely disseminated collar advertisement. He enjoyed looking that way, and occasionally he enjoyed talking as if he were exactly that kind of person. He loved to turn his ironic levity against the character he seemed to be, much as the mad wags who grace the column of F. P. A. delight in getting their sayings across accompanied by a gentle satirical fillip at all mad waggery.

"Speaking of bubbles," he suddenly chuckled as he carefully adjusted his tie in the collar that looked exactly like the one in the advertisement, "there's an old party in the next room that takes 'em more seriously than you do, Jack."

The old downtown hotel in which Tommy lived had once been a known and noted hostelry, and persons from Plumville, Pennsylvania, Griffin, Georgia, and Galva, Illinois, still stopped there when in New York, because their fathers and mothers had stopped there on their wedding journeys perhaps. It was not such a very long way from the Eden Musee, when there was an Eden Musee. Tommy's room had once formed part of a suite. The bathroom which adjoined it had belonged jointly to another room in the suite. But now these two rooms were always let separately. Still, however, the bathroom was a joint affair. When Tommy wished to bathe he must first insure

privacy by hooking on the inside the door that led into the bathroom from the chamber beyond.

"Old party in the next room?" questioned Jack.

"Uh-huh," said Tommy, who had benefited by his cold sluicing and his rubdown. "I gave him a few bubbles for his very own—through the keyhole into his room, you know. Poked that brass rod through and blew the bubble in his room. Detached it with a little jerk and let it float. Seemed more sociable, you know, to let him in on the fun. Never be stingy with your pleasures, Jack. Shows a mean spirit—a mean soul. Why not cheer the old party up with soap bubbles? Cost little, bubbles do. More than likely he's a stranger in New York. Unfriendly city, he thinks. Big city. Nobody thinks of him. Nobody cares for him. Away from home. Winter day. Melancholy. Well, I say, give him a bubble now and then. Shows some one is thinking of him. Shows the world isn't so thoughtless and gloomy after all. Neighborly sort of thing to do, Jack. Makes him think of his youth—home—mother's knee—all that kind of thing, Jack. Cheers him up. Sat in the tub there and got to thinking of him. Almost cried, Jack, when I thought how lonely the old man must be—got one of these old man's voices. Whiskers. Whiskers deduced from the voice. So I climbed out of the tub every ten or fifteen minutes all afternoon and gave the old man a bubble. Rain outside—fog, sleet. Dark indoors. Old man sits and thinks nobody loves him. Along

comes a bubble. Old man gets happy. Laughs. Remembers his infancy. Skies clear. You think I'm a selfish person, Jack? I'm not. I'm a Samaritan. Where will we eat?"

"You are a darned fool," said Jack. "You say he took them seriously? What do you mean? Did he like 'em?"

"Couldn't quite make out," said Tommy. "But they moved him. Gasped every now and then. Think he prayed. Emotion, Jack. Probably made him think of boyhood's happy days down on the farm. Heard him talking to himself. Think he cried. Went to bed anyhow with his clothes on and pulled the covers over his head. Looked through the keyhole and saw that. Gray whiskers sticking up, and that's all. Deduced the whiskers from the voice, Jack. Let's give the old party a couple more bubbles and then go eat. It's been an hour since he's had one. Thinks I'm forgetting him, no doubt."

So they gave the old man a couple of bubbles, poking the brass rod through the keyhole of the door.

The result was startling and unexpected. First there came a gasp from the other room, a sort of whistling release of the breath, and an instant later a high, whining, nasal voice.

"Oh, God! God! Again! You meant it, then, God! You meant it!"

The two young men started back and looked at each other in wonderment. There was such a

quivering agony, such an utter groveling terror in this voice from the room beyond that they were daunted.

"What's eating him?" asked Dobson, instinctively dropping his tones to a whisper.

"I don't know," said Tommy, temporarily subdued. "Sounds like that last one shell-shocked him when it exploded, doesn't it?"

But Tommy was subdued only for a moment.

As they went out into the corridor he giggled and remarked, "Told you he took 'em seriously, Jack."

II

"Seriously" was a word scarcely strong enough for the way in which the old party in the room beyond had taken it, though he had not, in fact, seen the bubble. He had only seen a puff of smoke coming apparently from nowhere, originating in the air itself, as it seemed to him, manifesting itself, materializing itself out of nothing, and floating in front of the one eye which was peeping fearfully out of the huddled bedclothing which he had drawn over himself. He had lain quaking on the bed, waiting for this puff of smoke for an hour or more, hoping against hope that it would not come, praying and muttering, knotting his bony hands in the whiskers that Tommy had seen sticking up from the coverings, twisting convulsively.

Tommy had whimsically filled the bubble, as he blew it, with smoke from his cigarette. He had

in like manner, throughout the afternoon and early evening, filled all the bubbles that he had given the old man with cigarette or pipe smoke. The old party had not been bowled over by anything in Tommy's tobacco. He had not noticed that the smoke was tobacco smoke, for he had been smoking a pipe himself the greater part of the day, and had not aired out the room. It was neither bubbles nor tobacco that had flicked a raw spot on his soul. It was smoke.

III

Bubbles! They seemed to be in Tommy's brain. Perhaps it was the association of ideas that made him think of champagne. At any rate he declared that he must have some, and vetoed his friend's suggestion that they dine—as they frequently did—at one of the little Italian table d'hôte places in Greenwich Village.

"You're a bubble and I'm a bubble and the world is a bubble," Tommy was saying a little later as he watched the gas stirring in his golden drink.

They had gone to the genial old Brevoort, which was—but why tell persons who missed the Brevoort in its mellower days what they missed, and why cause anguished yearnings in the bosoms of those who knew it well?

"Tommy," said his friend, "don't, if you love me, hand out any more of your jejune poeticism or musical-comedy philosophy. I'll agree with you

that the world is a bubble for the sake of argument, if you'll change the record. I want to eat, and nothing interferes with my pleasure in a meal so much as this line of pseudocerebration that you seem to have adopted lately."

"Bubbles seem trivial things, Jack," went on Tommy, altogether unperturbed. "But I have a theory that there aren't any trivial things. I like to think of the world balancing itself on a trivial thing. Look at the Kaiser, for instance. A madman. Well, let's say there's been a blood clot in his brain for years—a little trivial thing the size of a pin point, Jack. It hooks up with the wrong brain cell; it gets into the wrong channel, and—pouf! The world goes to war. A thousand million people are affected by it—by that one little clot of blood no bigger than a pin point that gets into the wrong channel. An atom! A planet balanced on an atom! A star pivoting on a molecule!"

"Have some soup," said his friend.

"Bubbles! Bubbles and butterflies!" continued Tommy. "Some day, Jack, I'm going to write a play in which a butterfly's wing brushes over an empire."

"No, you're not," said Jack. "You're just going to talk about it and think you're writing it and peddle the idea round to everybody you know, and then finally some wise guy is going to grab it off and really write it. You've been going to write a play ever since I knew you."

"Yes, I am; I'm really going to write that play."

"Well, Tommy," said Jack, looking round the chattering dining room, "this is a hell of a place to do it in!"

"Meaning, of course," said Tommy serenely, "that it takes more than a butterfly to write a play about a butterfly."

"You get me," said his friend. And then after a pause he went on with sincerity in his manner: "You know I think you could write the play, Tommy. But unless you get to work on some of your ideas pretty soon, and buckle down to them in earnest, other people will continue to write your plays—and you will continue to josh them and yourself, and your friends will continue to think that you could write better plays if you would only do it. People aren't going to take you seriously, Tommy, till you begin to take yourself a little seriously. Why, you poor, futile, silly, misguided, dear old mutt, you! You don't even have sense enough—you don't have the moral continuity, if you follow me—to stay sore at a man that does you dirt! Now, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Tommy a little more seriously.

"Well now, do you?" persisted his friend. "I don't say it's good Christian doctrine not to forgive people. It isn't. But I've seen people put things across on you, Tommy, and seen you laugh it off and let 'em be friends with you again inside

of six weeks. I couldn't do it, and nine-tenths of the fellows we know couldn't do it; and in the way you do it it shouldn't be done. You should at least remember, even if you do forgive; remember well enough not to get bit by the same dog again. With you, old kid, it's all a part of your being a butterfly and a bubble. It's no particular virtue in you. I wouldn't talk to you like a Dutch uncle if I didn't think you had it in you to make good. But you've got to be prodded."

"There's one fellow that did me dirt," said Tommy musingly, "that I've never taken to my bosom again."

"What did you do to him?" asked his friend. "Beat him to death with a butterfly's wing, Tommy, or blow him out of existence with a soap bubble?"

"I've never done anything to him," said Tommy soberly. "And I don't think I ever would do anything to him. I just remember, that's all. If he ever gets his come-uppance, as they say in the rural districts, it won't be through any act of mine. Let life take revenge for me. I never will."

"I suppose you're right," said Dobson. "But who was this guy? And what did he do to you?"

IV

"He was—and is—my uncle," said Tommy, "and he did about everything to me. Listen! You think I do nothing but flitter, flutter, frivol and flivver! And you may be right, and maybe I

never will do anything else. Maybe I never will be anything but a kid.

"I was young when I was born. No, that's not one of my silly lines, Jack. I mean it seriously. I was young when I was born. I was born with a jolly disposition. But this uncle of mine took it out of me. I'll say he did! The reason I'm such a kid now, Jack, is because I had to grow up when I was about five years old, and I stayed grown up until I was seventeen or eighteen. I never had a chance to be a boy. If I showed any desire to be it was knocked out of me on the spot. And if I live two hundred years, and stay nineteen years old all that time, Jack, I won't any more than make up for the childhood I missed—that was stolen from me. Frivol? I could frivol a thousand years and not dull my appetite. I want froth, Jack: froth and bubbles!

"This old uncle of mine—he wasn't so old in years when I first knew him, but in his soul he was as old as the overseers who whipped the slaves that built Cheops' pyramid, and as sandy and as flinty—hated me as soon as he saw me. He hated me before he saw me. He would have hated me if he had never seen me, because I was young and happy and careless.

"I was that, when I went to live with him—young and happy and careless. I was five years old. He was my father's brother, Uncle Ezra was, and he beat my father out of money in his dirty, underhanded way. Oh, nothing illegal! At

least, I suppose not. Uncle Ezra was too cautious to do anything that might be found out on him. There was nothing that my mother could prove, at any rate, and my father had been careless and had trusted him. When my father died my mother was ill. He gave us a home, Uncle Ezra did. She had to live somewhere; she had to have a roof over her head and attention of some sort. She had no near relations, and I had to be looked after.

"So she and I went into his house to live. It was to be temporary. We were to move as soon as she got better. But she did not live long. I don't remember her definitely as she was before we went to live with Uncle Ezra. I can only see her as she lay on a bed in a dark room before she died. It was a large wooden bed, with wooden slats and a straw mattress. I can see myself sitting on a chair by the head of the bed and talking to her. My feet did not reach to the floor by any means; they only reached to the chair rungs. I can't remember what she said or what I said. All I remember of her is that she had very bright eyes and that her arms were thin. I remember her arms, but not her face, except the eyes. I suppose she used to reach her arms out to me. I think she must have been jolly at one time, too. There is a vague feeling, a remembrance, that before we went to Uncle Ezra's she was jolly, and that she and I laughed and played together in some place where there was red-clover bloom.

"One day when I was siting on the chair, the door opened and Uncle Ezra came in. There was some man with him that was, I suppose, a doctor. I can recall Uncle Ezra's false grin and the way he put his hand on my head—to impress the doctor, I suppose—and the way I pulled away from him. For I felt that he disliked me, and I feared and hated him.

"Yes, Uncle Ezra gave us a home. I don't know how much you know about the rural districts, Jack. But when an Uncle Ezra in a country town gives some one a home he acquires merit. This was a little town in Pennsylvania that I'm talking about, and Uncle Ezra was a prominent citizen—deacon in the church and all that sort of thing. Truly rural drama stuff, Jack, but I can't help that—it's true. Uncle Ezra had a reputation for being stingy and mean. Giving us a home was a good card for him to play. My mother had a little money, and he stole that, too, when she died.

"I suppose he stole it legally. I don't know. It wasn't much. No one had any particular interest in looking out for me, and nobody would want to start anything in opposition to Uncle Ezra in that town if it could be helped anyhow. He didn't have the whole village and the whole of the farming country round about sewed up, all by himself, but he was one of the little group that did. There's a gang like that in every country town, I imagine. He was one of four or five big ducks in

that little puddle—lent money, took mortgages and all that kind of thing you read about. I don't know how much he is worth now, counting what he has been stealing all his life. But it can't be a staggering sum. He's too cowardly to plunge or take a long chance. He steals and saves and grinds in a little way. He is too mean and small and blind and limited in his intelligence to be a big, really successful crook, such as you will find in New York City.

"When my mother died, of course, I stayed with Uncle Ezra. I suppose everybody said how good it was of him to keep me, and that it showed a soft and kindly spot in his nature after all, and that he couldn't be so hard as he had the name of being. But I don't see what else could have been done with me, unless he had taken me out and dropped me in the mill pond like a blind cat. Sometimes I used to wish he had done that.

"It isn't hard to put a five-year-old kid in the wrong, so as to make it appear—even to the child himself—that he is bad and disobedient. Uncle Ezra began that way with me. I'm not going into details. This isn't a howl; it's merely an explanation. But he persecuted me in every way. He put me to work before I should have known what work was—work too hard for me. He deviled me and he beat me, he clothed me like a beggar and he fed me like a dog, he robbed me of childhood and of boyhood. I won't go over the whole thing.

"I never had decent shoes, or a hat that wasn't

a rag, and I never went to kid parties or anything, or even owned so much as an air rifle of my own. The only pair of skates I ever had, Jack, I made for myself out of two old files, with the help of the village blacksmith—and I got licked for that. Uncle Ezra said I had stolen the files and the straps. They belonged to him.

"But there's one thing I remember with more of anger than any other. He used to make me kneel down and pray every night before I went to bed, in his presence; and sometimes he would pray with me. He was a deacon in the church. There are plenty of them on the square—likely most of them are. But this one was the kind you used to see in the old-fashioned melodramas. Truly rural stuff, Jack. He used to be quite a shark at prayer himself, Uncle Ezra did. I can remember how he looked when he prayed, with his eyes shut and his Adam's apple bobbing up and down and the sound whining through his nose.

"The only person that was ever human to me was a woman I called Aunt Lizzie. I don't know really what relation she was to me; a distant cousin of Uncle Ezra's, I think. She was half blind and she was deaf, and he bullied her and made her do all the housework. She was bent nearly double with drudgery. He had given her a home, too. She didn't dare be very good to me. He might find it out, and then we both would catch it. She baked me some apple dumplings once on one of my birthdays. I was nine years old. And he said she had

stolen the apples and flour from him; that he had not ordered her to make any apple dumplings, and it was theft; and he made me pray for her, and made her pray for herself, and he prayed for both of us in family prayers every day for a week.

"I was nearly eighteen when I ran away. I might have done it sooner, but I was small for my age, and I was cowed. I didn't dare to call my soul my own, and I had a reputation for being queer, too. For I used to grin and laugh at things no one else thought were funny—when Uncle Ezra wasn't round. I suppose people in that town thought it was odd that I could laugh at all. No one could understand how I had a laugh left in me. But when I was alone I used to laugh. I used to laugh at myself sometimes because I was so little and so queer. When I was seventeen I wasn't much bigger than a thirteen-year-old kid should be. I packed a lot of growing into the years between seventeen and twenty-one.

"When I ran away Aunt Lizzie gave me eighty-seven cents, all in nickels and pennies, and there were two or three of those old-fashioned two-cent pieces in it, too, that she had had for God knows how long. It was all she had. I don't suppose he ever paid her anything at all, and the wonder was she had that much. I told her that when I got out into the world and made good I would come and get her, but she shivered all over with fright at the idea of daring to leave. I have sent her things from time to time in the last ten years—

money, and dresses I have bought for her, and little things I thought she would like. But I don't know whether he let her have them or not. I never got any letter from her at all. I don't even know whether she can write, to tell the truth, and she wouldn't dare get one of the neighbors to write for her. But if I ever make any real money, Jack, I am going to go and get her, whether she dares to come away or not.

"Well, when I left, the thing I wanted to do was go to school. Uncle Ezra hadn't given me time to go to school much. But I tramped to a town where there was a little fresh-water college that had its own prep school attached, and I did the whole seven years of prep school and college in five years. You see, I had a lot of bounce in me. The minute I got away from Uncle Ezra the whole world brightened up for me. The clouds rolled by and life looked like one grand long joke, and I turned into a kid. I romped through that prep school and that college, and made my own living while I was doing it, and laughed all the time and loved the world and everything in it, and it came as easy to me as water comes to a duck. I came on down here to New York and was lucky enough to get a chance as a reporter, and I've been romping ever since.

"I don't want to do anything but romp. Of course, I want to write some good stuff some day, but I want to keep romping while I write it, and I want it to be stuff that has a romp in it, too. You

say I romp so much I'm never serious. Well, I do have some serious moments, too. I have a dream that keeps coming to me. I dream that I'm back in that little town, and that I'm Uncle Ezra's slave again, and that I can't get away.

"Sometimes the dream takes the form of Uncle Ezra coming here to New York to get me, and I know that I've got to go back with him to that place, and I wake up sweating and crying like an eight-year-old kid. If he ever really came it would put a crimp into me, Jack.

"You say I'm a butterfly. And I say, yes, Jack, thank God I am! I used to be a grubworm, and now I'm a butterfly, praise heaven!

"Well, that's the guy I hold the grudge against, and that's why I'm fool enough to rush into every pleasure I can find. I don't know that I'll ever change. And as for the man, I don't ever want to see him. I don't know that I'd ever do anything to him if I did—beat him to death with a butterfly's wing, or blow him up with a soap bubble, as you suggested. Let him alone. He'll punish himself. He is punished by being what he is. I wouldn't put a breath into the scale one way or the other—not even a puff of cigarette smoke."

He blew a breath of cigarette smoke luxuriously out of his nose as he finished, and then he remarked, "Let's go somewhere and dance."

"Nazimova is doing Ibsen uptown," suggested Jack, "and I have a couple of tickets. Let's go and see Ibsen Ib a little."

"Nope," said Tommy. "Ibsen's got too much sense. I want something silly. Me for a cabaret, or some kind of a hop garden."

V

But sometimes in this ironical world it happens that we have already beaten a man to death with a butterfly's wing, slain him with a bubble, sent him whirling into the hereafter on a puff of smoke, even as we are saying that such a thing is foreign to our thoughts.

The old party in the room next to Tommy's at the hotel had arrived the day before, with an umbrella, a straw suitcase and a worried eye on either side his long, white, chalkish, pitted nose. He seemed chilly in spite of his large plum-colored overcoat, of a cut that has survived only in the rural districts. He wore a salient, assertive beard, that had once been sandy and was now almost white, but it was the only assertive thing about him. His manner was far from aggressive.

An hour after he had been shown to his room he appeared at the desk again and inquired timidly of the clerk, "There's a fire near here?"

"Little blaze in the next block. Doesn't amount to anything," said the clerk.

"I heard the —the engines," said the guest apologetically.

"Doesn't amount to anything," said the clerk again. And then, "Nervous about fire?"

The old party seemed startled.

"Who? Me? Why should I be nervous about fire? No! No! No!" He beat a sudden retreat. "I was just asking—just asking," he threw back over his shoulder.

"Old duck's scared of fire and ashamed to own it," mused the clerk, watching him out of the lobby.

The old party went back to his room, and there one of the first things he saw was a copy of the Bible lying on the bureau. There is an organization which professes for its object the placing of a Bible in every hotel room in the land. The old party had his own Bible with him. As if reminded of it by the one on the bureau, he took it out of his suitcase and sat down and began to turn the leaves like a person familiar with the book—and like a person in need of comfort, as indeed he was.

There was a text in Matthew that he sought—where was it? Somewhere in the first part of Matthew's gospel—ah, here it is: The twelfth chapter and the thirty-first verse:

"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. . . ."

There is a terrible reservation in the same verse. He kept his eyes from it, and read the first part over and over, forming the syllables with his lips, but not speaking aloud.

"All manner of sin—all manner of sin——"

And then, as if no longer able to avoid it, he

yielded his consciousness to the latter clause of the verse:

"But the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."

What was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Could what he had done be construed as that? Probably if one lied to God in his prayers, that was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—one form of it. And had he been lying to God these last two weeks when he had said over and over again in his prayers that it was all a mistake? It hadn't been all a mistake, but the worst part of it had been a mistake.

He went out for his dinner that evening, but he was in again before ten o'clock. He could not have slept well. At two o'clock in the morning he appeared in front of the desk.

He had heard fire engines again.

"See here," said the night clerk, appraising him, as the day clerk had done, as a rube who had been seldom to the city and was nervous about fire, "you don't need to be worried. If anything should happen near here we'd get all the guests out in a jiffy."

The old party returned to his room. He was up early the next morning and down to breakfast before the dining room was open.

He did not look as if he had had much rest. The morning hours he devoted to reading his Bible in his room. Perhaps he found comfort in it. At noon he seemed a bit more cheerful. He

asked the clerk the way to the Eden Musee, and was surprised to learn that that place of amusement had been closed for a year or two. The clerk recommended a moving-picture house round the corner. But it had begun to rain and snow and sleet all together; the sky was dark and the wind was rising; the old party elected not to go out after all.

He went back to his room once more, and his black fear and melancholy descended upon him again, and the old debate began to weave through his brain anew. For two weeks he had been fleeing from the debate and from himself. He had come to New York to get away from it, but it was no good. Just when he had made up his mind that God had forgiven him, and was experiencing a momentary respite, some new doubt would assail him and the agony would begin again.

The old debate—he had burned the store, with the living quarters over it, to get the insurance money, after having removed a part of the insured goods, but he did not regard that as an overwhelming sin. It wasn't right, of course, in one way. And yet in another way it was merely sharp business practice, so he told himself. For a year before that, when one of his buildings had burned through accident, he had been forced to accept from the same insurance company less than was actually due him as a matter of equity. Therefore, to make money out of that company by a shrewd trick was in a way merely to get back his

own again. It wasn't the sort of thing that a deacon in the church would care to have found out on him, of course. It was wrong in a sense. But it was the wrong that it had led to that worried him.

It was the old woman's death that worried him. He hadn't meant to burn her to death, God knows! He hadn't known she was in the building.

He had sent her on a week's visit to another town, to see a surprised cousin of his own, and it had been distinctly understood that she was not to return until Saturday. But some time on Friday evening she must have crept back home and gone to bed in her room. He had not known she was there.

"I didn't know! I didn't know!"

There were times when he gibbered the words to himself by the hour.

It was at midnight that he had set fire to the place. The old woman was deaf. Even when the flames began to crackle she could not have heard them. She had had no more chance than a rat in a trap. The old fool! It was her own fault! Why had she not obeyed him? Why had she come creeping back, like a deaf old half-blind tabby cat, to die in the flames? It was her own fault! When he thought of the way she had returned to kill herself there were moments when he cursed and hated her.

But had she killed herself? Back and forth swung the inner argument. At times he saw clearly

enough that this incident joined on without a break to the texture of his whole miserable life; when he recognized that, though it might be an accident in a strictly literal sense that the old woman was dead, yet it was the sort of accident for which his previous existence had been a preparation. Even while he fiercely denied his guilt, or talked of it in a seizure of whining prayer that was essentially a lying denial, he knew that guilt there was.

Would he be forgiven? There were comforting passages in the Bible. He switched on the rather insufficient electric light, which was all the old hotel provided, for the day was too dark to read without that help, and turned the pages of the New Testament through and through again.

At three o'clock in the afternoon he was sitting on the edge of his bed, with the book open in front of him and his head bowed, almost dozing. His pipe, with which he had filled the room with the fumes of tobacco, had fallen to the floor. Perhaps it was weariness, but for a brief period his sharper sense of fear had been somewhat stilled again. Maybe it was going to be like this—a gradual easing off of the strain in answer to his prayers. He had asked God for an answer as to whether he should be forgiven, and God was answering in this way, so he told himself. God was going to let him get some sleep, and maybe when he woke everything would be all right again—bearable at least.

So he mused, half asleep.

And then all at once he sprang wide awake again, and his terror wakened with him. For suddenly in front of his half-shut eyes, coming from nowhere in particular, there passed a puff of smoke!

What could it mean? He had asked God for an answer. He had been lulled for a moment almost into something like peace, and—now—this puff of smoke! Was it a sign? Was it God's answer?

He sat up on the edge of the bed, rigid, in a cold, still agony of superstitious fright. He dared not move or turn his head. He was afraid that he would see—something—if he looked behind him. He was afraid that he would in another moment hear something—a voice!

He closed his eyes. He prayed. He prayed aloud. His eyes once closed, he scarcely dared open them again. After some minutes he began to tell himself that perhaps he had been mistaken; perhaps he had not seen smoke at all. Perhaps even if he had seen smoke it was due to some explicable cause, and not meant for him.

He greatly dared. He opened his eyes. And drifting lazily above the white pillow at the head of the bed was another puff of smoke.

He rocked back and forth upon the bed, with his arms up as if to shield his head from a physical blow, and then he passed in a moment from the quakings of fear to a kind of still certainty of doom. God was angry at him. God was telling

him so. God would send the devil for him. There was no further doubt. He would go to hell—to hell! To burn forever! Forever—even as the old woman had burned for a quarter of an hour. He began to search through the pages of the Bible again, not for words of comfort this time, but in a morbid ecstasy of despair, for phrases about hell, for verses that mentioned fire and flames.

He did not need the concordance. He knew his Bible well, and his fear helped him. Consciousness and subconsciousness joined to guide his fingers and eyes in the quest.

"Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming," he read in Isaiah, and he took it to himself.

"Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof," he read in Ezekiel.

He had a literal imagination, and he had a literal belief, and at every repetition of the word "fire" the flesh cringed and crawled on his bones. God! To burn! How it must hurt!

"And the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God," met his eyes in the first book of Kings.

And it all meant him. Now and then over his shoulder would float another little puff of smoke; and once, lifting his head suddenly from poring over the book, he thought he saw something that moved and glinted like a traveling spark, and was gone.

He began to feel himself in hell already. This

was the foretaste, that was all. Would he begin to burn even before he died? Did this smoke presage something of that kind? Would flames physically seize upon him, and would he burn, even as the old woman had burned?

Suddenly in his hysteria there came a revulsion —a revolt. Having reached the nethermost depths of despair, he began to move upward a little. His soul stirred and took a step and tried to climb. He began to pray once more. After all, the Good Book did promise mercy! He began to dare to pray again. And he prayed in a whisper that now and then broke into a whine—a strange prayer, characteristic of the man.

"Oh, God," he cried, "you promise forgiveness in that book there, and I'm gonna hold you to it! I'm gonna hold you to it! It's down there in black and white, your own words, God, and I'm gonna hold you to it! It's a contract, God, and you ain't the kind of a man, God, to go back on a contract that's down in black and white!"

Thus he prayed, with a naïve, unconscious blasphemy. And after long minutes of this sort of thing his soul dared take another step. A faint, far glimmering of hope came to him where he groveled. For he was groveling on the bed now, with the covers pulled up to his head and his hand upon the open Bible. He found the courage to peer from beneath the covers at intervals as he prayed and muttered, and minutes passed with no more smoke. Had the smoke ceased? The sound

of his own murmuring voice began to reassure him. The smoke had certainly ceased! It had been twenty minutes since he had seen it—half an hour!

What could it mean? That God was hearkening to his prayer?

An hour went by, and still there was no more sign of smoke. He prayed feverishly, he gabbled, as if by the rapidity of his utterance and the repeated strokes of his words he were beating back and holding at bay the smoke that was God's warning and the symbol of his displeasure. And the smoke had ceased to come! He was to be forgiven! He was winning! His prayers were winning for him! At least God was listening!

Yes, that must be it. God was listening now. The smoke had come as a warning; and he had, upon receiving this warning, repented. God had not meant, after all, that he was doomed irrevocably. God had meant that, to be forgiven, his repentance must be genuine, must be thorough—and it was thorough now. Now it was genuine! And the smoke had ceased! The smoke had been a sign, and he had heeded the sign, and now if he kept up his prayers and lived a good life in the future he was to be forgiven. He would not have to burn in hell after all.

The minutes passed, and he prayed steadily, and every minute that went by and brought no further sign of the smoke built up in him a little more hope, another grain of confidence.

An hour and a quarter, and he almost dared be

sure that he was forgiven—but he was not quite sure. If he could only be quite sure! He wallowed on the bed, and his hand turned idly the pages of the Bible, lying outside on the coverlet.

More than an hour had gone by. Could he accept it as an indication that God had indeed heard him? He shifted himself upon the bed, and stared up at the ceiling through a chink in the covers as if through and beyond the ceiling he were interrogating heaven.

And lying so, there came a damp touch upon his hand, soft and chill and silent, as if it were delicately and ironically brushed by the kiss of Death. A sudden agony numbed his hand and arm. With the compulsion of hysteria, not to be resisted, his head lifted and he sat up and looked. Over the Bible and his hand that lay upon the open page there floated again a puff of smoke, and faintly staining his fingers and the paper itself was something moist and red. It stained his fingers and it marked with red for his straining sight this passage of Isaiah:

"The earth also shall disclose her blood."

It was then he cried out, "Oh, God! God! Again! You meant it, then, God! You meant it!"

VI

It was nearly midnight when Tommy and his friend Dobson returned to the hotel. "Your paper's been trying to get you for an hour, Mr.

Hawkins," said the night clerk when they came in. "Story right in the next room to yours. Old party in there hanged himself."

"So?" said Tommy. "Ungrateful old guy, he is! I put in the afternoon trying to cheer him up a little."

"Did you know him?" asked the clerk.

"Nope," said Tommy, moving toward the elevator.

But a few moments later, confronted with the grotesque spectacle in the room upstairs, he said, "Yes—I—I know him. Jack! Jack! Get me out of here, Jack! It's Uncle Ezra, Jack! He's—he's come for me!"

As has been remarked before, sometimes even a bubble may be a mordant weapon.

VIII.—The Chances of the Street

VIII.—The Chances of the Street

MERRIWETHER BUCK had lost all his money. Also his sisters', and his cousins', and his aunts'.

"At two o'clock sharp I will shoot myself," said Merriwether Buck.

He caressed a ten-shot automatic pistol in the right-hand pocket of his coat as he loitered up Broadway. He was light-headed. He had had nothing to eat for forty-eight hours.

"How I hate you!" said Merriwether Buck, comprehensively to the city in general. "If nine pistol shots would blot you out, I'd do it!"

Very melodramatic language, this, for a well-brought-up young man; and thus indicating that he was light-headed, indeed. And as for the city, it continued to roar and rattle and honk and rumble and squeak and bawl and shuffle and thunder and grate in the same old way—supreme in its confidence that nine pistol shots could not, by any possibility, blot it out. That is one of the most disconcerting things about a city; you become enraged at it, and the city doesn't even know it. Unless you happen to be Nero it is very difficult to blot them out satisfactorily.

It was one o'clock. Merriwether Buck crossed the street at Herald Square and went over and stood in front of the big newspaper office. A portly young fellow with leaden eyes came out of the building and stood meditatively on the curb with his hands in the pockets of clothing that clamored shrilly of expense.

"Excuse me," said Merriwether Buck, approaching him, "but are you, by any chance, a reporter?"

"Uh," grunted the young man, frigidly affirmative.

"I can put you in the way of a good story," said Merriwether Buck, obeying an impulse: We may live anonymously but most of us like to feel that it will make a little stir when we die.

"Huh," remarked the reporter.

"At two o'clock," persisted Merriwether Buck, "I am going to shoot myself."

The reporter looked bored; his specialty was politics.

"Are you anybody in particular?" he asked, discouragingly.

"No," confessed Merriwether Buck. It didn't seem to be worth while to mention that he was one of the Bucks of Bucktown, Merriwether County, Georgia.

"I thought," said the reporter, with an air of rebuke, "that you said it was a *good* story."

"I am, at least, a human being," said Merriwether Buck, on the defensive.

"They're cheap, hereabout," returned the other, in the manner of a person who has estimated a good many assorted lots.

"You are callous," said Merriwether Buck. "Callous to the soul! What are you, but—but—Why, you are New York incarnate! That is what you are! And I think I will shoot you first!"

"I don't want to be a spoil sport," said the reporter, "but I'm afraid I can't allow it. I have a rather important assignment."

Merriwether played with the little automatic pistol in his pocket. It was not any regard for the consequences that deterred him from shooting the portly young man. But in his somewhat dizzy brain a fancy was taking shape; a whim worked in him. He drew his hand empty from the pocket, and that reporter came up out of the grave.

"I am hungry," said Merriwether Buck, in obedience to the whim.

"Now that you remind me of it," said the other, his lack-luster eyes lighting up a little, "so am I!" And he crossed the street and disappeared through the swinging doors of a café.

Callous, leaden-eyed young man! epitome of this hard town! So cried the spirit of Merriwether Buck; and then he spoke aloud, formulating his idea:

"New York, you are on trial. You are in the balances. I give you an hour. If I'm asked to lunch by two o'clock, all right. If not, I will kill myself, first carefully shooting down the most

prosperous citizens, and as many of 'em as I can reach. New York, it's up to you!"

The idea of playing it out that way tickled him to the heart; he had always loved games of chance. One man or woman out of all the prosperous thousands in the streets might save another prosperous half-dozen; might save as many as he could otherwise reach with nine shots from his pistol, for he would reserve the tenth for himself. Otherwise, there should be a sacrifice; he would offer up a blood atonement for the pagan city's selfishness. Giddy and feverish, and drunk with the sense of his power to slay, he beheld himself as a kind of grotesque priest—and he threw back his head and laughed at the maniac conceit.

A woman who was passing turned at the sound, and their eyes met. She smiled. Merriwether Buck was good to look at. So was she. She was of that type of which men are certain at once, without quite knowing why; while women are often puzzled, saying to themselves: "After all, it may be only her rings."

"Pardon me," said Merriwether Buck, overtaking her, "but you and I are to lunch together, aren't we?"

"I like your nerve!" said she. And she laughed. It was evident that she did like it. "Where?" she asked briefly, falling into step beside him.

"Wherever you like," said Merriwether. "I leave that to you, as I'm depending on you to pay the check."

She began a doubtful laugh, and then, seeing that it wasn't a joke, repeated:

"I like your nerve!" And it was now evident that she didn't like it.

"See here," he said, speaking rapidly, "my clothes look all right yet, but I'm broke. I'm hungry. I haven't had anything to eat since day before yesterday. I'm not kidding you; it's true. You looked like a good fellow to me, and I took a chance. Hunger" (as he spoke it he seemed to remember having heard the remark before), "hunger makes one a judge of faces; I gambled on yours."

She wasn't complimented; she regarded him with a manner in which scorn and incredulity were blended; Merriwether Buck perceived that, for some reason or other, she was insulted.

"Don't," she said, "don't pull any of that sentimental stuff on me. I thought you was a gentleman!"

And she turned away from him. He took a step in pursuit and started to renew his plea; for he was determined to play his game square and give the directing deities of the city a fair chance to soften whatsoever random heart they would.

"Beat it!" she shrilled, "beat it, you cheap grafter, or I'll call a cop!"

And Merriwether beat it; nor' by nor'west he beat it, as the street beats it; as the tides beat. The clock on the Times building marked 1.20 as

he paused by the subway station there. In forty minutes—just the time it takes to hook your wife's dress or put a girdle round the world—Merriwether Buck would be beating it toward eternity, shooing before him a flock of astonished ghosts of his own making. Twenty minutes had gone by and whatever gods they be that rule New York had made no sign; perhaps said gods were out at lunch or gone to Coney Island. Twice twenty minutes more, and——

But no. It is all over now. It must be. There emerges from the subway station one who is unmistakably a preacher. The creases of his face attest a smiling habit; no doubt long years of doing good have given it that stamp; the puffs of white hair above the temples add distinction to benignity.

"I beg your pardon," said Merriwether Buck, "but are you a minister?"

"Eh?" said the reverend gentleman, adjusting a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses. "Yes," he said pleasantly, "I am," and he removed the glasses and put them back on once again, as he spoke. Somehow, the way he did it was a benediction.

"I am hungry," said Merriwether.

"Dear me!" said the reverend gentleman. "I shouldn't have thought it."

"Will you ask me to lunch?"

"Eh?" It was an embarrassing question; but the gentleman was all good nature. His air indicated that he did not intend to let his own embar-

rassment embarrass Merriwether too much. "My dear man, you know—really——" He placed a shapely hand upon Merriwether's shoulder, rallyingly, almost affectionately, and completed the sentence with a laugh.

"It's charity I'm asking for," said Merriwether.

"Oh!" For some reason he seemed vastly relieved. "Have you been—but, dear me, are you sure you aren't joking?"

"Yes; sure."

"And have you—ahem!—have you sought aid from any institution; any charitable organization, you know?"

"But no," said Merriwether, who had instinctively eliminated charitable organizations, free lunches and police stations from the terms of his wager, "I thought——"

"My, my, my," hummed the reverend gentleman, interrupting him. He produced his card case and took a card therefrom. "I am going," he said, writing on the card with a pencil, "to give you my card to the secretary of the Combined Charities. Excellent system they have there. You'll be investigated, you know," he said brightly, as if that were an especial boon he was conferring, "your record looked into—character and antecedents and all that sort of thing!"

"And fed?" asked Merriwether.

"Oh, indeed!" And he handed over the card as if he were giving Merriwether the keys to the city—but not too gross and material a city either;

Merriwether felt almost as if he were being baptized.

"But," said Merriwether Buck, "I wanted *you* to feed me!"

"Oh, my dear man!" smiled the minister, "I *am* doing it, you know. I'm a subscriber—do *all* my charitable work this way. Saves time. Well, good-by." And he nodded cheerily.

"But," said Merriwether Buck, "aren't you interested in me personally? Don't you want to hear my story?"

"Story? Story?" hummed the other. "Indeed, but they'll learn your story there! They have the most excellent system there; card system; cases and case numbers, you know—Stories, bless you! Hundreds and hundreds of stories! Big file cases! You'll be number so-and-so. Really," he said, with a beaming enthusiasm, "they have a *wonderful* system. Well, good-by!" There was a touch of finality in his pleasant tone, but Merriwether caught him by the sleeve.

"See here," he said, "haven't you even got any *curiosity* about me? Don't you even want to know *why* I'm hungry? Can't you find time *yourself* to listen to the tale?"

"Time," said the reverend gentleman, "*time* is just what I feel the lack of—feel it sadly, at moments like these, sadly." He sighed, but it was an optimistic, good-humored sort of sigh. "But I tell you what you do." He drew forth another card and scribbled on it. "If you want to tell me

your story so very badly—(dear me, what remarkable situations the clerical life lets one in for!)—so *very* badly, take this card to my study about 3.30. You'll find my stenographer there and you can dictate it to her; she'll type it out. Yes, indeed, she'll type it out! Well, *good*-by!"

And with a bright backward nod he was off.

It was 1.25. There were thirty-five minutes more of life. Merriwether Buck gave the reverend gentleman's cards to a seedy individual who begged from him, with the injunction to go and get himself charitably Bertilloned like a gentleman and stop whining, and turned eastward on Forty-second Street. If you have but thirty-five minutes of life, why not spend them on Fifth Avenue, where sightly things abound?—indeed, if you happen to be a homicidal maniac of some hours standing, like Merriwether Buck, Fifth Avenue should be good hunting ground; the very place to mark the fat and greasy citizens of your sacrifice.

Time, the only patrician, will not step lively for the pert subway guards of human need, nor yet slacken pace for any bawling traffic cop of man's desire; he comes of an old family too proud to rush, too proud to wait; a fine old fellow with a sense of his own value. Time walked with Merriwether Buck as he loitered up Fifth Avenue, for the old gentleman loves to assist personally at these little comedies, sometimes; with Death a hang-dog third. Not even a fly-cop took note of the trio, although several, if they robbed a jewelry

store or anything like that, would tell the reporters later that they had noticed something suspicious at the time. And the patron deities of New York City might have been over in Hoboken playing pinochle for all the heed *they* took.

Which brings us to Sixty-fifth Street and 1.58 o'clock and the presence of the great man, all at once.

When Merriwether Buck first saw him, Merriwether Buck gasped. He couldn't believe it. And, indeed, it was a thing that might not happen again this year or next year or in five years—J. Dupont Evans, minus bulwark or attendant, even minus his habitual grouch, walking leisurely toward him like any approachable and common mortal. Merriwether Buck might well be incredulous. But it was he; the presentment of that remarkable face has been printed a hundred thousand times; it is as well known to the world at large as Uncle Pete Watson's cork leg is on the streets of Prairie Centre, Ill.; it is unmistakable.

To have J. Dupont Evans at the point of a pistol might almost intoxicate some sane and well-fed men, and Merriwether Buck was neither. J. Dupont Evans—the wealth of Croesus would be just one cracked white chip in the game he plays. But at this moment his power and his importance had been extraordinarily multiplied by circumstances. The chances of the street had tumbled down a half dozen banks—(well did Merriwether Buck know that, since it had ruined him)—and fi-

nancial panic was in the air; an epochal and staggering disaster threatened; and at this juncture a president in no wise humble had publicly confessed his own impotence and put it up to J. Dupont Evans to avert, to save, to reassure.

Merriwether Buck had not dreamed of this; in the crook of his trigger finger lay, not merely the life of a man, but the immediate destiny of a nation.

He grasped the pistol in his pocket, and aimed it through the cloth.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked J. Dupont Evans, politely enough.

It was only a second before the man answered. But in that second Merriwether Buck, crazily exalted, and avid of the sensation he was about to create, had a swift vision. He saw bank after bank come crashing down; great railroad systems ruined; factories closed and markets stagnant; mines shut and crops ungathered in the fields; ships idle at the wharves; pandemonium and ruin everywhere.

"Huh?" said J. Dupont Evans, gruffly, removing an unlighted cigar from his mouth. He looked at Merriwether Buck suspiciously, and made as if to move on. But he thought better of it the next instant, evidently, for he pulled out a plain silver watch and said grudgingly: "Two minutes of two." And then, in a tone less unpleasant, he asked: "Have you got a match, young man?"

Merriwether fumbled in his vest pocket. In a

minute and a half he would perfunctorily ask this man for lunch, and then he would kill him. But he would give him a match first—for Merriwether Buck was a well-brought-up young man. As he fumbled he picked out the exact spot on the other's waistcoat where he would plant the bullet. But the idea of a man on the edge of the grave lighting a cigar tickled him so that he laughed aloud as he held out the matches.

"What can I do with these?" snorted J. Dupont Evans. "They are the sort that light only on their own box." From his glance one might have gained the impression that he thought Merriwether Buck a fool.

"Great principle that," said Merriwether Buck, cackling with hysteria. It was so funny that a dead man should want to smoke a cigar! He would let him play he was alive for fifty seconds longer.

"Principle?" said Evans. "Principle? What Principle?"

"Well," said Merriwether, with the random argumentativeness of insanity, "it *is* a great principle. Apply that principle to some high explosive, for instance, and you have no more battleship flare-backs—no premature mine blasts——"

"Say," the other suddenly interrupted, "are you an inventor?"

"Yes," lied Merriwether Buck, glibly, although he had never given five seconds' thought to the subject of high explosives in his life. "That's how I

know. I've invented an explosive more powerful than dynamite. But it won't explode by contact with fire, like powder. Won't explode with a jar, like dynamite. Won't freeze, like dynamite. Only one way to explode it—you've got to bring it into contact with a certain other chemical the same as scratching one of these matches on its own box."

"The deuce, young man!" said the other. "There's a fortune in it! Is it on the market at all?"

"No," said Merriwether Buck, raising his pistol hand slightly and thrusting it a bit forward, under the mask of his coat pocket, "no money to start it going."

"Hum," mused the other. "I tell you what you do, young man. You come along to lunch with me and we'll talk the thing over—money and all."

And the directing deities of New York struck twice on all the city clocks, and striking, winked.

IX.—The Professor's Awakening

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How I ever come to hit such a swell-looking house for a handout I never knew. Not that there was anything so gaudy about it, neither, as far as putting up a bluff at being a millionaire's mansion went, which I found out afterwards it was, or pretty near that at any rate. But it was just about the biggest house in that Illinois town, and it's mostly that kind o' place with them naked iron heathens in the front yard and a brick stable behind that it ain't no use to go up against unless you're looking for a lemon. If you need real food and need it sudden and ain't prospecting around town for no other kind of an opening you better make for the nearest public works like a canal being dug, or a railroad gang. Hit the little tin dinner buckets, men that does the unskilled labor on jobs like that, except Swedes and Dagos, knowing what it is to be up against it themselves now and then and not inclined to ask no fool questions.

Well, I went around to the back door, and

Biddy Malone she lets me in. I found out that was her name afterwards, but as soon as I seen her face I guessed if her name wasn't Bridget it was Nora. It's all in the first look they give you after they open the door. If that look's right they're coming across and you'll get some kind of a surprise for your digestive ornaments and you don't need to make no fool breaks about sawing wood neither. I makes my little talk and Biddy she says come in; and into the kitchen I went.

"It's Minnesota you're working towards," says Biddy, pouring me out a cup of coffee.

She was thinking of the wheat harvest where there's thousands makes for every fall. But not for me, I never did like to work for none of them Scandiluvian Swedes and Norwegians that gets into the field before daylight and stays at it so long the hired men got to milk the cows by moonlight. They got no sense of proportion, them Gusses and Oles ain't.

"I been across the river into I'way," I says, "working at my trade, and I'm going back to Chicago to work at it some more."

"And what may your trade be?" says Biddy, sizing me up careful. I seen I made a hit somehow or she wouldn't of asked me in the first place was I going to the wheat harvest, but would of just supposed I was a hobo, which I ain't. I got a lot of trades when I want to use one, and as a regular thing I rather work at one of them for a while, too, but can't stand it very long on account

of not feeling right to stay in one place too long, especially in the summer. When I seen I made a hit with Biddy I thinks I'll hand her a good one she never heard tell of before.

"I'm an agnostic by trade," I says. I spotted that one in a Carnegie library one time and that was the first chance I ever had to spring it.

"I see," says Biddy. And she opened her eyes and mouth to once. I seen she didn't see, but I didn't help her none. She would of rather killed herself than let on she didn't see. Most of the Irish is like that whether they is kitchen mechanics or what. After a while she says, pouring me out some more coffee and handing me a little glass jar full of watermelon rinds boiled in with molasses and things, she says:

"And ain't that the dangerous thing to work at, though!"

"It is," I says, and says nothing further.

She sets down and folds her arms like she was thinking about it, watching my hands all the time as if she was looking for scars where something slipped when I done that agnostic work. Finally she says with a sigh:

"Sure, and it's dangerous! Me brother Patrick was kilt at it in the old country. He was the most vinturesome lad of thim all!"

She was putting up a stiff front, and for a minute I don't know whether she's stringing me or I'm stringing her. The Irish is like that. So being through eating I says:

"Did it fly up and hit him?"

She looks at me scornful and tosses her chin up and says:

"No. He fell off of it. And I'm thinking you don't know what one of them is, after!"

"What is it, then?" says I.

"Then you *don't* know," says she; and the next thing I knew I'd been eased out the back door and she was grinning at me through the crack of it with superiousness all over her face.

So I was walking slow around towards the front thinking to myself how the Irish was a great people; and shall I go to Chicago and maybe get a job sailing on the lakes till navigation closes, or shall I go back to Omaha and work in the railroad yards again, which I don't like much, or shall I go on down to Saint Looey just to see what's doing. And then I thinks: "Billy, you was a fool to let that circus walk off and leave you asleep with nothing over you but a barb wire fence this morning, and what are you going to do now? First thing you know you'll be a regular hobo, which some folks can't distinguish you ain't now." And then I thinks I'll go down to the river and take a swim and lazy around in the grass a while and think things over and maybe something will happen. Anyways, you can always join the army. And just when I was thinking that I got by one of them naked stone heathens that was squirting water out of a sea shell and a guy comes down the front steps on the jump and nabs me by

the coat collar. I seen he was a doctor or else a piano tuner by the satchel he dropped when he grabbed me.

"Did you come out of this house?" he says.

"I did," I says, wondering what next.

"Back in you goes," he says, marching me towards the front steps. "They've got smallpox in there."

I liked to a-jumped loose when he said that, but he twisted my coat collar and dug his thumbs into my neck and I seen they wasn't no use pulling back. If a guy that's knocking around mixes up with one of the solid citizens the magistrate's going to give him the worst of it on principle. I ain't no hobo and never was, and never traveled much with none of them professional bums, but there has been times I had hard work making some people believe it. I seen I couldn't jerk away and I seen I couldn't fight and so I went along. He rung the door bell, and I says:

"Smallpox ain't no inducement to me, doc."

"No?" says he. And the door opened, and in we went. The girl that opened it, she drew back when she seen me.

"Tell Professor Booth that Dr. Wilkins wants to see him," says the doc, not letting loose of me.

And we stood there saying nothing till the perfessor come in, which he did slow and absent-minded. When he seen me he stopped and took off a pair of thick glasses that was split in two like

a mended show case, so he could see me better, and he says:

"What is that you have there, Dr. Wilkins?"

"A guest for you," says Dr. Wilkins, grinning all over himself. "I caught him leaving the house, and you being under quarantine and me being secretary to the board of health, I'll have to ask you to keep him here until we can get Miss Margery on her feet again," he says. Or they was words to that effect, as the lawyers asks you.

"Dear me," says Perfessor Booth, kind o' helplesslike. And he put his glasses on and took them off again, and come up close and looked at me like I was one of them amphimissourian specimens in a free museum. "Dear me," he says, looking worrieder and worrieder all the time. And then he went to the foot of the stairs and pipes out in a voice that was so flat-chested and bleached-out it would a-looked just like him if you could a-saw it—"Estelle," he says, "O Estelle!"

I thinks the perfessor is one of them folks that can maybe do a lot of high-class thinking, but has got to have some one tell 'em what the answer is. But I doped him out wrong as I seen later on.

Estelle, she come down stairs looking like she was the perfessor's big brother. I found out later she was his old maid sister. She wasn't no spring chicken, Estelle wasn't, and they was a continuous grin on her face. I figgered it must of froze there years and years ago. They was a kid about ten or eleven years old come along down with her,

that had hair down to its shoulders and didn't look like it knowed whether it was a girl or a boy. Miss Estelle, she looks me over in a way that makes me shiver, while the doctor and the perfessor jaws about whose fault it is the smallpox sign ain't been hung out. And when she was done listening she says to the perfessor: "You had better go back to your laboratory." And the perfessor he went along out, and the doctor with him.

"What are you going to do with him, Aunt Estelle?" the kid asks her.

"What would *you* suggest, William Dear?" asks his aunt. I ain't feeling very comfortable, and I was getting all ready just to natcherally bolt out the front door now the doctor was gone. Then I thinks it mightn't be no bad place to stay in fur a couple o' days, even risking the smallpox. Fur I had ricolected I couldn't ketch it nohow, having been vaccinated a few months before in Terry Hutt by compulsory medical advice, me being temporary engaged in repair work on the city pavements through a mistake in the police court.

William Dear looks at me when his aunt put it up to him just as solemn as if it was the day of judgment and his job was separating the fatted calves from the goats and the prodigals, and he says:

"Don't you think, Aunt Estelle, we better cut his hair and bathe him and get him some clothes the first thing?"

"William is my friend," thinks I, and I seen right off he was one of them serious kids that you can't tell what is going on inside their heads.

So she calls James, which was the butler, and James he buttled me into a bathroom the like of which I never see before; and he buttled me into a suit of somebody's clothes and into a room at the top of the house next to his'n, and then he come back and buttled a razor and a comb and brush at me; him being the most mournful-looking fat man I ever seen, and he informs me that me not being respectable I will eat alone in the kitchen after the servants is done. People has made them errors about me before. And I looks around the room and I thinks to myself that this is all right so far as it has went. But is these four walls, disregarding the rest of the house, to be my home, and them only? Not, thinks I, if little Billy knows it. It was not me that invited myself to become the guest of this family; and if I got to be a guest I be damned if I don't be one according to Hoyle's rules of etiquette or I'll quit the job. Will I stay in this one room? Not me. Suppose the perfessor takes it next? And then William Dear? And suppose when William Dear gets through with it he gives it to Aunt Estelle? Am I to waste the golden hours when, maybe, my country needs me, just for accommodation? But I thinks it's all right for a day or two and then I'll leave my regrets and go on down to Saint Looey or somewheres. And then James he buttles back

into the room like a funeral procession and says the perfessor says he wants to see me in the laboratory.

That was a big room and the darndest looking room I ever see, and it smelt strong enough to chase a Hungarian pig sticker out of a Chicago slaughter house. It smelt like a drug store had died of old age and got buried in a glue factory. I never seen so much scientific effusions and the things to hold 'em in mixed up in one place before. They must of been several brands of science being mixed up there all to once. They was dinky little stoves, they was glass jars of all shapes and sizes labeled with Dago names standing around on shelves like in one of them Dutch delicatessen stores; they was straight glass tubes and they was glass tubes that had the spinal contortions; they was bones and they was whole skeletons, and they was things that looked like whisky stills; they was a bookcase full of bugs and butterflies against one wall; they was chunks of things that might have been human for all I know floating around in vats like pickled pork in a barrel; they was beer schooners with twisted spouts to them; they was microscopes and telescopes and twenty-seven shapes and sizes of knives; they was crates of stuff that was unpacked and crates that wasn't; and they was tables with things just piled and spilled over 'em, every which way, and the looks of everything was dirty on account of the perfessor not allowing any one in there but himself and Miss Estelle and

William. And whether you knowed anything about them different brands of science or not you could see the perfessor was one of them nuts that's always starting to do things and then leaving them go and starting something else. It looked as if the operating room of an emergency hospital and a blacksmith shop and a people's free museum and a side show full of freaks, snakes and one-eyed calves had all gone out and got drunk together, all four of them, and wandered into a cremation plant to sleep off that souse; and when they woke up they couldn't tell which was which nor nothing else except they had a bad taste in their mouth and was sentenced to stay there unseparated and unhappy and unsociable in each other's company for evermore. And every time you turned around you stepped on something new, and if you saw a rat or a lizard or a spider you better let him alone for how was you going to tell he was dead or alive till he crawled up you?

The perfessor, he was setting over by a window, and he pushed out another chair for me and he says sit down.

"You are a gentleman of leisure?" he says, with a grin; or words to that effect.

"I work at that sometimes," I told him, "although it ain't rightly my trade."

"Biddy Malone says you're an agnostic," he says, looking at me close. It won't do, I thinks, to spring none of them agnostic gags on him, so I says nothing.

"I'm one myself," he says.

"Regular," I asks him, "or just occasional?"

He kind o' grins again, and I thinks: "Billy, you're making a hit somehow."

Then he says, like he was apologizing to someone about something: "Being interested in sociology and the lower classes in general, I sent for you to get some first-hand observations on your train of mind," he says. Or it was words like them. "I'm a sociologist," he says.

I seen I made a hit before and I thinks I'll push my luck, so I swells up and says:

"I'm a kind of sociologist myself."

"Hum," he says, thoughtful-like. "Indeed? And your itinerant mode of subsistence is persecuted in pursuit of your desire to study knowledge of the human specimen and to observe wisdom as to the ways they live in the underworld," he says. Or it was words to that effect. I wish I'd a-had him wrote them words down. Then I'd a-had 'em just right now. I seen a bunch of good words help a man out of a hole before this. Words has always been more or less my admiration; you can never tell what one of them long gazaboos is going to do till you spring it on somebody. So I says:

"That's me, perfessor. I likes to float around and see what's doing."

Then he tells me that sociology was how the criminal classes and the lower classes in general was regarded by the scientific classes, only it's a

difficult brand of science to get next to, he says, on account of the lower classes like me being mostly broke out with environment he says, unbeknownst even to theirselves. He's not what you would call a practicing sociologist all the time, being afraid, I suppose, he would catch it if he got too close to it; he's just one of the boys that writes about it, so as both the lower classes and the scientific classes won't make no bad breaks, he says.

But what he wants of me just now ain't got nothing to do with that, he says. He's been making experiments with all kinds of canned victuals, that is put up with acid that eats holes in your stomach, he says, and so long as I'm going to be a guest he's going to mix some of them acids in my chuck and weigh me after each meal. He says I'll start slow and easy and there won't be nothing dangerous about it. He's been practicing on William Dear and Miss Estelle, which I suppose it was the acids got into her smile, but he's going to give them a rest, them being naturally delicate. I ain't got no kick, I thinks, and I'm going to leave this place in a day or two anyhow. Besides, I always was intrusted in scientific things and games of chance of all kinds.

But I didn't leave in a few days, and the first thing I knew I'd been there a week. I had pretty much the run of the house, and I eat my meals with Biddy Malone, the only uncomfortable feature of being a guest being that Miss Estelle, soon

as she found out I was an agnostic (whatever brand of science that is, which I never found out to this day, just having come across the word accidental), she begun to take charge of my religion and intellectuals and things like that. She used to try to cure the perfessor, too, but she had to give it up for a bad job, Biddy says.

Biddy, she says Mrs. Booth's been over to her mother's while this smallpox has been going on; which I hadn't knowed they was a Mrs. Booth before. And Biddy, she says if she was Mrs. Booth she'd stay there, too. They's been a lot of talk, anyhow, Biddy says, about Mrs. Booth and some musician fellow around town. But Biddy she likes Mrs. Booth, and even if it was so who could blame her?

Things ain't right around that house since Miss Estelle's been there, which the perfessor's science, though worrying to the nerves, ain't cut much ice till about four years ago when Miss Estelle come.

But Mrs. Booth she's getting where she can't stand it much longer, Biddy says. I didn't blame her none for feeling sore about things.

You can't expect a woman that's pretty and knows it, and ain't more'n thirty-two or three years old, and don't look it, to be interested in mummies and pickled snakes and the preservation of the criminal classes and chemical profusions, not *all* the time. And maybe when she'd ask the perfessor if he wasn't going to take her to the opera he'd ask her did she know them Germans

had invented a newfangled disease or that it was a mistake about them Austrians hiding their heads in the sand when they are scared, which any fool that's ever seen 'em working around a coal mine ought to of knowed. It wouldn't a-been so bad if the perfessor had just picked out one brand of science and stuck to it. She could a-got used to any one kind and knowed what to expect. But maybe this week the perfessor's bug would be ornithography, and he'd be chasing sparrows all over the front lawn; and next week it would be geneology and he'd be trying to grow bananas on a potato vine. Then he'd get worried about the nigger problem in the south, and settle it all up scientific and explain how ethnology done the whole damn thing, lynchings and all, and it never could be straightened out till it was done scientific. Every new gag that come out the perfessor took up with it, Biddy says; one time he'd be fussing around with gastronomy through a telescope and the next he'd be putting astrology into William's breakfast food.

They was a row on all the time about the kids, which they hadn't been till Miss Estelle come. Mrs. Booth she said they could kill their own selves if they wanted to, but she had more right than anybody to say what went into William's digestive ornaments, and she didn't want him brought up scientific nohow, but just human. He was always making notes on William, which was how William come to take so little interest in life

after a while. But Miss Estelle, she egged him on. She seen he didn't have no sense about his money, which had been left to him when he was a sure enough perfessor in a college before he quit and went nuts and everything begun to go wrong between him and Mrs. Booth, so Miss Estelle she took to running his money herself; but she seen likewise that when it come to writing articles about William's insides and intellectuals the perfessor he was a genius. Well, maybe he was; but Biddy wouldn't let him try none of them laboratory gags on her though she just as soon be hypnotized and telepathed as not just to humor him. Miss Estelle, she eat what the perfessor give her, and after a while she says she'll take charge of the children's education herself, their mother being a frivolous young thing, and it was too bad, she says, a genius like him couldn't a-married a noble woman who would a-understood his great work for humanity and sympathized with it. So while the perfessor filled William and Miss Margery up on new discovered food and weighed 'em and probed 'em and sterilized 'em and did everything else but put 'em in glass bottles, Miss Estelle she laid out courses of reading matter for them and tended to their religion and intellectuals and things like that. I reckon they never was two kids more completely educated, inside and out. It hadn't worked much on Miss Margery yet, her being younger than William. But William took it hard and serious, being more like his

father's family, and it made bumps all over his head. I reckon by the time William was ten years old he knew more than a whole high school, and every time that boy cut his finger he just naturally bled science. But somehow he wasn't very chipper, and whenever the perfessor would notice that he and Miss Estelle would change treatment. But Biddy liked William just the same, they hadn't spoiled his disposition none; and she said he seen a lot of things his aunt never would a-seen, William did. One day when I first was a guest I says to his aunt, I says:

"Miss Booth, William looks kind o' pale to me like he was getting too much bringin' up to the square inch."

She acted like she didn't care for no outsiders butting in, but I seen she'd noticed it, too, and she liked William, too, in a kind of scientific sort of a way, and she says in a minute:

"What do you suggest?"

"Why," says I, "what a kid like that needs is to roll around and play in the dirt now and then, and yell and holler."

She went away like she was kind o' mad about it; but about an hour later the perfessor sent word for me to come down to the labaratory, and Miss Estelle was there.

"We have decided that there is something in what you say," says the perfessor. "Even the crudest and most untrained intellectuals has now and then a bright hunch from which us men of

special knowledge may take a suggestion," he says, or words to that effect. And they was a whole lot more, and they was more scientific than that. I didn't know I'd done nothing important like that, but when he told me all about it in science talk I seen I made a ten strike, though I should of thought anyone could of saw all William needed was just to be allowed to be a little more human.

But what do you think—I never was so jarred in my life as I was the next day. I seen Miss Estelle spreading an oilcloth on the floor, and then the butler come in and poured a lot of nice, clean, sterilized dirt on to it. And then she sent for William.

"William Dear," she says, "we have decided that what you need is more recreation mixed in along with your intellectuals. You ought to romp and play in the dirt, close to the soil and nature, as is right for a youth of your age. For an hour each day right after you study your biology and before you take up your Euclid you will romp and play in this dirt like a child of nature, and frolic. You may now begin to frolic, William, and James will gather up the dirt again for to-morrow's frolic." Or it was words to that effect.

But William didn't frolic none. He seen things they didn't. He just looked at that dirt, and he come the nearest to smiling I ever seen William come; and then he come the nearest to getting mad I ever seen William come. And then he says very serious:

"Aunt Estelle," he says, "I shall *not* frolic. I have come to that place in my discretions where my intellectuals got to work some for theirselves. It is them intellectuals which you have trained that refuses to be made ridiculous one hour each day between the biology lesson and the Euclid lesson with sand." Those was not William's exact words, which he always had down as slick as his pa, but they was what he meant. William was a serious kid, but he seen things his aunt never had no idea of. And he never did frolic, neither, and all that nice clean dirt had to be throwed out by the stable amongst the unscientific dirt again.

That was before Biddy Malone told me about why it was that the perfessor and his wife didn't get along well, and as I was saying I didn't blame her none, Miss Estelle having finally beat her out about her own children, too; and she feeling she didn't scarcely own 'em no more, and they hardly daring to kiss their own mamma with Miss Estelle in the room because of germs, so Biddy says. Biddy, she says the perfessor is all right, he's just a fool and don't mean no harm by his scientific gags, but Miss Estelle she's a she-devil and takes that way to make herself the boss of that house. If she wasn't there Mrs. Booth would have been boss and never let the perfessor know it and things wouldn't a-been so bad. Which shows that so long as every house got to have a boss it ain't so much difference if it's a him or a her so long as it ain't a relation.

The perfessor always eats his dinner in one of them coats with the open-face vest to it, and one night I thinks I will, too. When you is in Rome you does like the Dagos does, I thinks.

So I sends for James along before dinner time and I says: "Where is my dinky clothes to eat dinner in?" I says.

James he says I'm to continue to eat dinner by myself. Which is all right, I tells him, but I'll do it in style or I'll quit the job. So he goes and asks Miss Estelle, and she comes in with that lemon grin on, but looking, too, like I done something to please her.

"Is it true," she says, "that already the effects of a refined environment has overcome defections in early training and a misfortune in ancestral hereditary?" she says. Or they was words to that effect.

"It is true," I says. And the perfessor's being too small she made James give me his'n. But when I seen all that shirt front it made me feel kind of uncomfortable, too. So I takes them off again and puts on my old striped sweater and puts on the vest and coat over that, and the effect of them red stripes running crossways is something gorgeous with one of them open-face vests over it.

So after I eat I don't want to go to bed and I gets a box of the perfessor's cigars and goes into the library and thinks I'll see if he's got anything fit to read. I dig around for a while among them

shelves, and most everything is one brand of science or other, but finally I got hold of a little book that was real interesting. That was the damndest book! It was all in rhyme, with the explanations of the rhyme printed in real talk down the sides so as you could tell where you was at and what it was about. It's about an Ancient Mariner. The nut that wrote it he's never been sailing none, I bet; but he can make you feel like you been going against the hop in one of them Chink joints. Of course, there ain't nothing real literary about it like one of them Marie Corelli stories I read once and it ain't got the excitement of a good Bill Hart movie or a Nick Carter story, but I got real interested in it. The I-man of that story he was a Jonah to the whole ship. He seen an albatross circling around, and he up with his air gun and give him his'n. It wasn't for nothing to eat, but just to be a-shooting. And from that on everybody gets as sick of living as a bunch of Chicago factory hands when another savings bank busts, and they all falls down and curses him. And the snakes wiggles all over the top of the water like I seen 'em one time when they cleaned out a reservoir where one of them prairie towns gets its drinking water from. And the Ancient Mariner he tries to die and can't make it; and their ghosts is whizzing all around that ship and they go by him in the moonlight like a puff of steam goes by you on a frosty morning out of an engine-room manhole. And there's a moral to that story,

too. I bet the fellow that doped that out had been on an awful bat. I like to of talked with that nut. They was a fellow named Looney Hogan use to have them phoney hunches, and he use to tell me what he saw after he had 'em. Looney was awful good company and I use to like to hear him tell what he seen and what he thinks he seen, but he walked off of a grain barge up to Duluth when he was asleep one night and he never did wake up.

Sitting there thinking of the awful remarkable things that is, and the ones that isn't, and the ones that maybe is and maybe isn't, and the nuts that is phoney about some things and not about others, and how two guys can look at the same thing and when you ask them about it both has seen different things, I must a-went to sleep. And I must a-slept a long time there, and pretty soon in my sleep I heard two voices and then I wakes up sudden and still hears them, low and quicklike, in the room that opens right off from the library with a pair of them sliding doors like is on to a boxcar. One was a woman's voice, and not Miss Estelle's, and she says like she was choked up:

"But I *must* see them before we go, Henry."

And the other was a man's voice, and it wasn't no one around our house.

"But, my God!" he says, "suppose you catch it yourself, Jane!"

I set up straight then, and I would of give a

good deal to see through that door, because Jane was the perfessor's wife's first name.

"You mean suppose *you* get it," she says. I like to of seen the look she must of give him to fit in with the way she says that *you*. He didn't say nothing, the man didn't; and then her voice softens down some, and she says, low and slow: "Henry, wouldn't you love me if I *did* get it? Suppose it marked and pitted me all up?"

"Oh, of course," he says, "of course I would. Nothing can change the way I feel. *You* know that." He said it quick enough, all right, just the way they do in a show, but it sounded *too much* like it does on the stage to of suited me if *I'd* been her. I seen folks overdo them little talks before this.

I listens some more, and then I see how it is. This is that musician feller Biddy Malone's been talking about. Jane's going to run off with him all right, but she's got to kiss the kids first. Women is like that. They may hate the kids' pa all right, but they's dad-burned few of 'em don't like the kids. I thinks to myself: "It must be late. I bet they was already started, or ready to start, and she made him bring her here first so's she could sneak in and see the kids. She just simply couldn't get by. But she's taking a fool risk, too. Fur how's she going to see Margery with that nurse coming and going and hanging around all night? And even if she tries just to see William Dear it's a ten to one shot he'll wake up and she'll be ketched at it."

And then I thinks, suppose she *is* ketched at it? What of it? Ain't a woman got a right to come into her own house with her own door key, even if they is a quarantine on to it, and see her kids? And if she is ketched seeing them, how would anyone know she was going to run off? And ain't she got a right to have a friend of hern and her husband's bring her over from her mother's house, even if it is a little late?

Then I seen she wasn't taking no great risks neither, and I thinks mebby I better go and tell that perfessor what is going on, fur he has treated me purty white. And then I thinks: "I'll be goshderned if I meddle. So fur as I can see that there perfessor ain't getting fur from what's coming to him, nohow. And as fur *her,* you got to let some people find out what they want fur theirselves. Anyhow, where do *I* come in at?"

But I want to get a look at her and Henry, anyhow. So I eases off my shoes, careful-like, and I eases acrost the floor to them sliding doors, and I puts my eye down to the little crack. The talk is going backward and forward between them two, him wanting her to come away quick, and her undecided whether to risk seeing the kids. And all the time she's kind o' hoping mebby she will be ketched if she tries to see the kids, and she's begging off fur more time ginerally.

Well, sir, I didn't blame that musician feller none when I seen her. She was a peach.

And I couldn't blame her so much, either, when

I thought of Miss Estelle and all them scientifics of the perfessor's strung out fur years and years world without end.

Yet, when I seen the man, I sort o' wished she wouldn't. I seen right off that Henry wouldn't do. It takes a man with a lot of gumption to keep a woman feeling good and not sorry fur doing it when he's married to her. But it takes a man with twicet as much to make her feel right when they ain't married. This feller wears one of them little, brown, pointed beards fur to hide where his chin ain't. And his eyes is too much like a woman's. Which is the kind that gets the biggest piece of pie at the lunch counter and fergits to thank the girl as cuts it big. She was setting in front of a table, twisting her fingers together, and he was walking up and down. I seen he was mad and trying not to show it, and I seen he was scared of the smallpox and trying not to show that, too. And just about that time something happened that kind o' jolted me.

They was one of them big chairs in the room where they was that has got a high back and spins around on itself. It was right acrost from me, on the other side of the room, and it was facing the front window, which was a bow window. And that there chair begins to turn, slow and easy. First I thought she wasn't turning. Then I seen she was. But Jane and Henry didn't. They was all took up with each other in the middle of the room, with their back to it.

Henry is a-begging of Jane, and she turns a little more, that chair does. Will she squeak, I wonders?

"Don't you be a fool, Jane," says the Henry feller.

Around she comes three hull inches, that there chair, and nary a squeak.

"A fool?" asks Jane, and laughs. "And I'm not a fool to think of going with you at all, then?"

That chair, she moved six inches more and I seen the calf of a leg and part of a crumpled-up coat tail.

"But I *am* going with you, Henry," says Jane. And she gets up just like she is going to put her arms around him.

But Jane don't. Fur that chair swings clear around and there sets the perfessor. He's all hunched up and caved in and he's rubbing his eyes like he's just woke up recent, and he's got a grin on to his face that makes him look like his sister Estelle looks all the time.

"Excuse me," says the perfessor.

They both swings around and faces him. I can hear my heart bumping. Jane never says a word. The man with the brown beard never says a word. But if they felt like me they both felt like laying right down there and having a fit. They looks at him and he just sets there and grins at them.

But after a while Jane, she says:

"Well, now you *know!* What are you going to do about it?"

Henry, he starts to say something, too. But——

"Don't start anything," says the perfessor to him. "*You* aren't going to do anything." Or they was words to that effect.

"Professor Booth," he says, seeing he has got to say something or else Jane will think the worse of him, "I am——"

"Shut up," says the perfessor, real quiet. "I'll tend to you in a minute or two. *You* don't count for much. This thing is mostly between me and my wife."

When he talks so decided I thinks mebby that perfessor has got something into him beside science after all. Jane, she looks kind o' surprised herself. But she says nothing, except:

"What are you going to do, Frederick?" And she laughs one of them mean kind of laughs, and looks at Henry like she wanted him to spunk up a little more, and says: "What *can* you do, Frederick?"

Frederick, he says, not excited a bit:

"There's quite a number of things I *could* do that would look bad when they got into the newspapers. But it's none of them, unless one of you forces it on to me." Then he says:

"You *did* want to see the children, Jane?"

She nodded.

"Jane," he says, "can't you see I'm the better man?"

The perfessor, he was woke up after all them years of scientifics, and he didn't want to see her

go. "Look at him," he says, pointing to the feller with the brown beard, "he's scared stiff right now."

Which I would of been scared myself if I'd a-been ketched that-a-way like Henry was, and the perfessor's voice sounding like you was chopping ice every time he spoke. I seen the perfessor didn't want to have no blood on the carpet without he had to have it, but I seen he was making up his mind about something, too. Jane, she says:

"*You* a better man? *You?* You think you've been a model husband just because you've never beaten me, don't you?"

"No," says the perfessor, "I've been a blamed fool all right. I've been a worse fool, maybe, than if I *had* beaten you." Then he turns to Henry and he says:

"Duels are out of fashion, aren't they? And a plain killing looks bad in the papers, doesn't it? Well, you just wait for me." With which he gets up and trots out, and I heard him running down stairs to his labertory.

Henry, he'd ruther go now. He don't want to wait. But with Jane a-looking at him he's shamed not to wait. It's his place to make some kind of a strong action now to show Jane he is a great man. But he don't do it. And Jane is too much of a thoroughbred to show him she expects it. And me, I'm getting the fidgets and wondering to myself, "What is that there perfessor up to now? Whatever it is, it ain't like no one else. He is

looney, that perfessor is. And she is kind o' looney, too. I wonder if they is anyone that ain't looney sometimes? I been around the country a good 'eal, too, and seen and hearn of some awful remarkable things, and I never seen no one that wasn't more or less looney when the *search us the femm* comes into the case. Which is a Dago word I got out'n a newspaper and it means: "Who was the dead gent's lady friend?" And we all set and sweat and got the fidgets waiting fur that perfessor to come back.

Which he done with that Sister Estelle grin on to his face and a pill box in his hand. They was two pills in the box. He says, placid and chilly:

"Yes, sir, duels are out of fashion. This is the age of science. All the same, the one that gets her has got to fight for her. If she isn't worth fighting for, she isn't worth having. Here are two pills. I made 'em myself. One has enough poison in it to kill a regiment when it gets to working well—which it does fifteen minutes after it is taken. The other one has got nothing harmful in it. If you get the poison one, I keep her. If I get it, you can have her. Only I hope you will wait long enough after I'm dead so there won't be any scandal around town."

Henry, he never said a word. He opened his mouth, but nothing come of it. When he done that I thought I hearn his tongue scrape agin his cheek on the inside like a piece of sandpaper. He was scared, Henry was.

"But *you* know which is which," Jane sings out. 'The thing's not fair!"

"That is the reason my dear Jane is going to huffle these pills around each other herself," says he perfessor, "and then pick out one for him and ne for me. *You* don't know which is which, ane. And as he is the favorite, he is going to et the first chance. If he gets the one I want him o get, he will have just fifteen minutes to live fter taking it. In that fifteen minutes he will lease to walk so far from my house that he won't lie near it and make a scandal. I won't have a candal without I have to. Everything is going o be nice and quiet and respectable. The effect f the poison is similar to heart failure. No one an tell the difference on the corpse. There's going to be no blood anywhere. I will be found dead n my house in the morning with heart failure, or lse he will be picked up dead in the street, far nough away so as to make no talk." Or they vas words to that effect.

He is rubbing it in considerable, I thinks, that erfessor is. I wonder if I better jump in and stop he hull thing. Then I thinks: "No, it's between hem three." Beside, I want to see which one is going to get that there loaded pill. I always been ntrusted in games of chance of all kinds, and vhen I seen the perfessor was such a sport, I'm orry I been misjudging him all this time.

Jane, she looks at the box, and she breathes hard nd quick.

"I won't touch 'em," she says. "I refuse to be a party to any murder of that kind."

"Huh? You do?" says the perfessor. "But the time when you might have refused has gone by. You have made yourself a party to it already. You're really the *main* party to it.

"But do as you like," he goes on. "I'm giving him more chance than I ought to with those pills. I might shoot him, and I would, and then face the music, if it wasn't for mixing the children up in the scandal, Jane. If you want to see him get a fair chance, Jane, you've got to hand out these pills, one to him and then one to me. *You* must kill one or the other of us, or else *I'll* kill *him* the other way. And *you* had better pick one out for him, because *I* know which is which. Or else let him pick one out for himself," he says.

Henry, he wasn't saying nothing. I thought he had fainted. But he hadn't. I seen him licking his lips. I bet Henry's mouth was all dry inside.

Jane, she took the box and she went round in front of Henry and she looked at him hard. She looked at him like she was thinking: "Fur God's sake, spunk up some, and take one if it *does* kill you!" Then she says out loud: "Henry, if you die I will die, too!"

And Henry, he took one. His hand shook, but he took it out'n the box. If she had of looked like that at me mebby I would of took one myself. Fur Jane, she was a peach, she was. But I don't know whether I would of or not. When she makes

that brag about dying, I looked at the perfessor. What she said never fazed him. And I thinks agin: "Mebby I better jump in now and stop this thing." And then I thinks agin: "No, it is between them three and Providence." Beside, I'm anxious to see who is going to get that pill with the science in it. I gets to feeling just like Providence hisself was in that there room picking out them pills with his own hands. And I was anxious to see what Providence's ideas of right and wrong was like. So fur as I could see they was all three in the wrong, but if I had of been in there running them pills in Providence's place I would of let them all off kind o' easy.

Henry, he ain't eat his pill yet. He is just looking at it and shaking.

The perfessor reaches for his watch, and don't find none. Then he reaches over and takes Henry's watch, and opens it, and lays it on the table. "A quarter past one," he says. "Mr. Murray, are you going to make me shoot you after all? I didn't want any blood nor any scandal," he says. "It's up to you," he says, "whether you want to take that pill and get your even chance, or whether you want to get shot. The shooting way is sure, but looks bad in the papers. The pill way don't implicate any one," he says. "Which?" And he pulls a gun.

Henry he looks at the gun.

Then he looks at the pill.

Then he swallows the pill.

The perfessor puts his'n into his mouth. But he don't swallow it. He looks at the watch, and he looks at Henry. "Sixteen minutes past one," he says. *"Mr. Murray will be dead at exactly fourteen minutes to two.* I got the harmless one. I can tell by the taste of the chemicals."

And he put the pieces out into his hand to show that he chewed his'n up, not being willing to wait fifteen minutes for a verdict from his digestive ornaments. Then he put 'em back into his mouth and chewed 'em and swallowed 'em down like it was coughdrops.

Henry has got sweat breaking out all over his face, and he tries to make fur the door, but he falls down on to a sofa.

"This is murder," he says, weaklike. And he tries to get up agin, but this time he falls to the floor in a dead faint.

"It's a dern short fifteen minutes," I thinks to myself. "That perfessor must of put more science into Henry's pill than he thought he did fur it to of knocked him out this quick. It ain't skeercly three minutes."

When Henry falls the woman staggers and tries to throw herself on top of him. The corners of her mouth was all drawed down, and her eyes was turned up. But she don't yell none. She can't. She tries, but she just gurgles in her throat. The perfessor won't let her fall acrost Henry. He ketches her. "Sit up, Jane," he says, with that

Estelle look on to his face, "and let us have a talk."

She looks at him with no more sense in her face than a piece of putty has got. But she can't look away from him.

And I'm kind o' paralyzed, too. If that feller laying on the floor had only jest kicked oncet, or grunted, or done something, I could of loosened up and yelled, and I would of. I just *needed* to fetch a yell. But Henry ain't more'n dropped down there till I'm feeling just like he'd *always* been there, and I'd *always* been staring into that room, and the last word anyone spoke was said hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

"You're a murderer," says Jane in a whisper, looking at the perfessor in that stare-eyed way. "You're a *murderer,*" she says, saying it like she was trying to make herself feel sure he really was one.

"Murder!" says the perfessor. "Did you think I was going to run any chances for a pup like him? He's scared, that's all. He's just fainted through fright. He's a coward. Those pills were both just bread and sugar. He'll be all right in a minute or two. I've just been showing you that the fellow hasn't got nerve enough nor brains enough for a fine woman like you, Jane," he says.

Then Jane begins to sob and laugh, both to oncet, kind o' wildlike, her voice clucking like a hen does, and she says:

"It's worse then, it's worse! It's worse for me

than if it were a murder! Some farces can be more tragic than any tragedy ever was," she says. Or they was words to that effect.

And if Henry had of been really dead she couldn't of took it no harder than she begun to take it now when she saw he was alive, but just wasn't no good. But I seen she was taking on fur herself now more'n fur Henry. Women is made unlike most other animals in many ways. When they is foolish about a man they can stand to have that man killed a good 'eal better than to have him showed up ridiculous right in front of them. They will still be crazy about the man that's killed, but they don't never forgive the lobster. I seen that work out before this. You can be most any thing else and get away with it, but if you're a lobster it's all off even if you can't help being a lobster. And when the perfessor kicks Henry in the ribs and he comes to and sneaks out, Jane she never even looks at him.

"Jane," says the perfessor, when she quiets down some, "you got a lot to forgive me. But do you s'pose I learned enough sense so we can make a go of it if we start over again?"

But Jane never said nothing.

"Jane," he says, "Estelle is going back to New England to stay there for good."

She begins to take a little interest then. "Did Estelle tell you so?" she says.

"No," says the perfessor, "Estelle don't know

it yet. But she is. I'm going to tell her in the mornin'."

But she still hates him. She's making herself. She wouldn't of been a female woman if she'd of been coaxed that easy. Pretty soon she says, "I'm going upstairs and go to bed. I'm tired." And she went out looking like the perfessor was a perfect stranger.

After she left the perfessor set there quite a while and he was looking tired out, too; and there wasn't no mistake about me. I was asleep all through my legs, and I kept a wondering to myself, suppose them pills had one of them been loaded sure enough, which one would of got it? And when the perfessor leaves I says to myself, I reckon I better light a rag. So I goes to the front window and opens it easy; but I thinks about Henry's watch on the table, every one else having forgot it, and I thinks I better hunt him up and give it to him.

And then I thinks why should I give him pain, for that watch will always remind him of an unpleasant time he once had.

And if it hadn't been for me sitting in that window looking at that watch I wouldn't a-been writing this, for I wouldn't of been in jail now.

I tried to explain my intentions was all right, but the police says it ain't natural to be seen coming out of a front window at two in the morning in a striped sweater and a dinky dinner suit with

a gold watch in your hand; if you are hunting the owner you are doing it peculiar.

One of them reporters he says to me to write the truth about how I got into jail; nobody else never done it and stuck to facts. But this is the truth so help me; it was all on account of that watch, which my intentions with regard to was perfectly honorable, and all that goes before leads up to that watch. There wasn't no larceny about it; it was just another mistake on the part of the police. If I'd of been stealing wouldn't I stole the silverware a week before that?

The more I travel around the more dumb people I see that can't understand how an honest and upright citizen can get into circumstantial evidence and still be a honest and upright citizen.

X.—The Penitent

X.—The Penitent

"You, who are not married," said the penitent, "cannot know—can never realize——"

He hesitated, his glance wandering over the evidences of luxury, the hints of Oriental artistry, the esthetic effectiveness of Dr. Eustace Beaulieu's studio.

"Proceed," said Dr. Beaulieu, suavely. "What I may know is not the important thing. You do not address yourself to me, but through me to that principle of Harmony in the Cosmos which is Spirit—Ultimate Spirit—which we call God. All that I can do is assist you to get into Accord with the Infinite again, help you to vibrate in unison with the Cosmic All."

"You are right; I do not look to *you,*" said the penitent, "for ease of mind or spirit." And a fleeting half-smile showed in his eyes, as if some ulterior thought gave a certain gusto to the manner in which he stressed the pronoun *you.* But the rest of his scarred and twisted face was expressionless, beneath the thick mask of a heavy

Author's Note: "The Penitent" was suggested by two poems, "A Forgiveness," by Browning, and "The Portrait," by Owen Meredith.

gray-streaked beard that grew almost to his eyes.

Dr. Eustace Beaulieu was the leader—nay, the founder—of one of the many, many cults that have sprung up in New York City and elsewhere in America during the past three or four decades. An extraordinary number of idle, well-to-do women gathered at his studio two or three times a week, and listened to his expositions of ethics *de luxe,* served with just the proper dash of Oriental mysticism and European pseudoscience. He was forty, he was handsome, with magnetic brown eyes and the long sensitive fingers of a musician; he was eloquent, he was persuasive, he was prosperous.

When he talked of the Zend-Avesta, when he spoke of the Vedantic writings, when he touched upon the Shinto worship of the Nipponese, when he descanted upon the likeness of the Christian teachings to the tenets of Buddhism, when he revealed the secrets of the Yogi philosophy, when he hinted his knowledge of the priestly craft of older Egypt and of later Eleusis, his feminine followers thrilled in their seats as a garden of flowers that is breathed upon by a Summer wind—they vibrated to his words and his manner and his restrained fervor with a faint rustling of silken garments and a delicate fragrance of perfume.

Men were not, as a rule, so enthusiastic concerning Dr. Eustace Beaulieu and his cult; there were few of them at his lectures, there were few of them enrolled in the classes where he inducted

his followers into the more subtle phases of ethics, where he led them to the higher planes of occultism, for a monetary consideration; few of them submitted themselves to him for the psychic healing that was one of his major claims to fame. And this scarred and bearded stranger, who limped, was one of the very few men who had ever intimated a desire to bare his soul to Dr. Beaulieu, to tell his story and receive spiritual ministration, in the manner of the confessional. These confessionals, after the public lectures, had been recently introduced by Dr. Beaulieu, and they were giving him, he felt, a firmer grip upon his flock—his disciples, he did not hesitate to call them.

"I repeat," said the penitent—if he was a repentant man, indeed—"no bachelor can know what love really is. He cannot conceive of what the daily habit of association with a woman who seems made for him, and for him alone, may mean to a man. My love for my wife was almost worship. She was my wife indeed, I told myself, and she it was for whom I worked.

"For I did work, worked well and unselfishly. Every man must have some work. Some do it from necessity, but I did it because I loved the work—and the woman—and thus I gained a double reward. I was a politician, and something more. I think I may say that I was a patriot, too. The inheritor of wealth and position, I undertook to clear the city in which I lived, and which my forefathers had helped to build, of the ring of

grafters who were making the name of the town a byword throughout the nation. The details of that long and hard strife are not pertinent. I fought with something more than boldness and determination; I fought with a joy in every struggle, because I fought for something more than the world knew. The world could not see that my inspiration was in my home; that in the hours of battle my blood sang joyously with the thought of—her! Was it any wonder that I worked well?

"One day, as I sat in my office downtown, the thought of her drew me so strongly that I determined to surprise her by coming home unexpectedly early. It was summer, and we were living in our country home, an old-fashioned stone residence a couple of miles from the outskirts of the city. The house was situated at the edge of a park that was, indeed, almost virgin forest, for the whole estate had been in my family for nearly a hundred years.

"I determined to surprise my wife, and at the same time to take the rare relaxation of a suburban walk. I was soon outside the city limits, and through the zone where vacant lots broaden into fields; and then I left the road, cutting across the fields and finally plunging into the woods on my own place. Thus it was that I approached the house from the rear and came suddenly out of the timber into my own orchard. I seldom walked from town, and it was a good long hour before my usual time of arrival, although in that sheltered

and woody place the dusk was already gathering in.

"As I entered the orchard a man made a hurried exit from a vine-wreathed pergola where my wife often sat to read, cast one look at me, cleared the orchard fence, and made off through the woods, disappearing at once among the boles of the trees.

"He had not turned his full face toward me at any time, but had shielded it with an upflung arm; from the moment he broke cover until his disappearance there had passed less time than it takes to tell it, and I was scarcely to be blamed if I was left guessing as to his identity, for the moment. For the moment, I say.

"There had been so much fright in his manner that I stood and looked after him. The thought came to me that perhaps here was a man who had had an affair with one of my servants. I turned toward the pergola and met—my wife!

"She was a beautiful woman, always more beautiful in her moments of excitement. She confronted me now with a manner which I could not help but admire. I trusted her so that she might readily have passed off a much more anomalous situation with an easy explanation. But in her face I read a deliberate wish to make me feel the truth.

"I looked at her long, and she returned the gaze unflinchingly. And I recognized her look for what it was. She had cast off the chains of deceit. Her glance was a sword of hatred, and the first

open thrust of the blade was an intense pleasure to her. We both knew all without a word.

"I might have killed her then. But I did not. I turned and walked toward the house; she followed me, and I opened the door; she preceded me inside. She paused again, as if gathering all her forces for a struggle; but I passed her in silence, and went upstairs to my own room.

"And then began a strange period in my life. Shortly after this episode came a partial triumph of the reform element in my city; the grafters were ousted, and I found myself with more than a local reputation, and thrust into an office. My life was now even more of a public matter than before. We entertained largely. We were always in the public eye. Before our guests and in public we were always all that should be. But when the occasion was past, we would drop the mask, turn from each other with dumb faces, and go each our severed ways.

"For a year this sort of life kept up. I still worked; but now I worked to forget. When I allowed myself to think of her at all, it was always as of some one who was dead. Or so I told myself, over and over again, until I believed it.

"One day there was a close election. I was the successful candidate. I was to go to Congress. All evening and far into the night my wife and I played our parts well. But when the last congratulation had been received, and the last speech made, and the last friend had gone, and we were

alone with each other once more, she turned to me with a look something like the one she had met me with on that summer evening a year before.

" 'I want to speak with you,' she said.

" 'Yes?'

"They were the first words we had exchanged in that year, when not compelled by the necessities.

" 'What do you wish to speak about?' I asked her.

" 'You know,' she said, briefly. And I did know. There was little use trying to deny it.

" 'Why have you asked me no questions?' she said.

"I would have made another attempt to pass the situation over without going into it, but I saw that that would be impossible. She had reached the place where she must speak. I read all this in her face. And looking at her closely with the first candid glance I had given her in that year, I saw that she had changed greatly, but she was still beautiful.

" 'I did not choose to open the subject with you,' I said; 'I thought that you would explain when you could stand it no longer. Evidently that time has come. You were to me like a dead person. If the dead have any messages for me, they must bring them to me unsolicited. It was not my place to hunt among the tombs.'

" 'No,' she said, 'let us be honest, since it is the last talk we may ever have together. Let us be

frank with each other, and with ourselves. I was not like a dead person to you. The dead are dead, and I am not. You asked me no questions because you disdained me so. You despised me so—and it was sweet to you to make me feel the full weight of your scorn through this silence. It was better than killing me. Is that not the real reason?'

" 'Yes,' I admitted, 'that is it. That is the truth.'

" 'Listen,' she said, 'it would surprise you—would it not—to learn that I still love you—that I have loved you all along—that you are the only man I have ever really loved—that I love you now? All that is incredible to you, is it not?'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'it is. You must pardon me, but—it is incredible to me.'

" 'Well, it is true,' she said, and paused a moment. 'And I can tell you why it is true, and why—why—the—the other was true, too. You—you do not understand women,' she said. 'Sometimes I think if you were a smaller man, in some ways, you would understand them better. Sometimes I think that you are too—too big, somehow—ever to make a woman happy. Not too self-centered; you are not consciously selfish; you never mean to be. But you give, give, give the riches of your nature to people—to the world at large—instead of to those who should share them.

" 'Oh, I know—the fault is all mine! Another kind of woman—the right kind for you—the kind you thought I was—would not have asked for all that was a necessity for me; would have been big

enough to have done without it; would have lost herself in your love for all humanity. That is the kind of woman you thought I was. And I tried to be. But I wasn't. I wasn't that big.

" 'I did sympathize with your work; I could understand it; I loved to hear you tell about it. But I loved it because it was you that told me about it. You didn't see that! You thought I was a goddess. It was enough for your nature to worship me; to set me upon a pedestal and to call me your inspiration; oh, you treated me well—you were faithful to me—you were generous! But you neglected me in a way that men do not understand; that some men will never understand. While you were giving your days and your nights, and every fiber of your brain and body, to what you called the cause of the people, you more and more forgot you had a wife. Again and again and again I tried to win you back to what you were when I married you—to the time when your cause was not all—but you wouldn't see; I couldn't make you feel.

" 'Then I thought I would show you that other men were not such fools as to overlook what was wasted on you. But you never noticed; you trusted me too much; you were too much engrossed. And then I began to hate you. I loved you more than I ever did before, and at the same time I hated you. Can you understand that? Do you see how women can hate and love at the same time? Well, they can.

" 'At last—for I was a fool—I took a lover!'

" 'What was his name?' I broke in.

" 'His name?' she cried; 'that does not matter! What matter if there was one of them, or two of them. That is nothing!—the name is nothing—they were nothing—nothing but tools; the symbols of my rage, of my hatred for you; whether I loved or hated you, you were all—always.'

" 'They were merely convenient clubs with which to murder my honor in the dark—is that it?' I said.

" 'Yes,' she said, 'that is it, if you choose to put it so.' And she spoke with a humility foreign to her nature.

" 'And what now?' I asked.

" 'Now,' she said, 'now that I have spoken; now that I have told you everything; now that I have told you that I have gone on loving you more and more and more—now—I am going to die.'

" 'You have not asked me to forgive you,' I said.

" 'No,' she replied. 'For what is forgiveness? I do not know exactly what that word means. It is supposed to wipe out something that has happened, is it not?—to make things the same as they were before! But it does not do that. That which has happened, has happened; and you and I know it.'

" 'You had better live,' I said; 'I no longer consider you worthless. I feel that you are worthy of my anger now.'

"Her face cleared almost into something like joy.

" 'I have told the truth, and I raise myself from the depths of your scorn to the place where you can feel a hot rage against me?' she asked.

" 'Yes,' I said. And the light on her face was like that of which some women are capable when they are told that they are beloved.

" 'And if I die?' she asked.

" 'Who knows but that you might climb by it?' I said. 'Who knows but what your death might turn my anger to love again?' And with that I turned and left her there.

"That night I sat all night in my study, and in the morning they brought me the news that she was dead. She must have used some poison. What, I do not know; and the physicians called it heart-failure. But what is the matter, Doctor?"

"Nothing, nothing!" said Dr. Beaulieu. And he motioned for the narrator to proceed. But there were beads of perspiration upon the healer's forehead, and a pallor overspread his face.

"I had condemned her to death," the penitent went on, "and she had been her own executioner. She had loved me; she had sinned against me; but she had always loved me; she had hated the flesh that sinned, and scorned it as much as I; her life was intolerable and she had been her own executioner.

"The revulsion of feeling came. I loved her again; now that I had lost her. All that day I

shut myself up, seeing no one; refusing to look at the dozens of telegrams that came pouring in from friends and acquaintances, thinking—thinking—thinking——

"Night came again; and with it the word that the best friend I had was in the house; a friend of my college days, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with me in many a fight, then and since. He had come to be under the same roof with me in the hour of my bitterest bereavement, was the word he sent—how bitter now, he did not know. But he did not intrude upon the privacy of my grief. And I sat thinking—thinking—thinking——

"Suddenly the idea came to me that I would go upstairs to the chamber where she was, and look at her once more. Quietly I stole up the stairs, and through the hushed, dim house, on into the gloomy room, lighted only by the candles at the head and foot of the curtained couch on which she lay.

"In the room beyond, the watchers sat. I stole softly across the floor so as not to attract their attention; there was no one in the room with the body. I approached the couch, and with my hand put by the curtain——

"Then I dropped it suddenly. I remembered a locket which she had formerly worn that had always had my picture in it, in the early days of our married life; a locket that had never left her neck, waking or sleeping. And I wondered——

"I wondered something about women which no one has ever been able to tell me; not even a woman. I wondered if any light o' love had ever been able to make her feel anything like *real* love, after all! I wondered if she had ever hugged the thought of her sin to her bosom, even as she had at first hugged the thought of our real love—hers and mine. I wondered if she had ever carried about with her a sentimental reminder of her lover, of any lover, as she had once done of her husband—and how long ago! I wondered how important a thing it had seemed to her, after all! She had reconciled herself to herself, with her death, and made me love her again. And I wondered to how great an extent she had ever fooled a lover into thinking she loved him! There are depths and contradictions and cross-currents in the souls of women that even women do not know, far less men—I wondered whose picture was in that locket!

"I thrust my hand through the curtains of the bed again, and then jumped back.

"I had felt something warm there.

"Did she live, after all?

"At the same instant I heard a movement on the other side of the bed. I went around.

"My best friend was removing his hand from the curtains on the other side, and in his hand was the locket. It was his hand that I had felt.

"We stared at each other. I spoke first, and in

a whisper, so that the others in the next room, who had come to watch, should not hear.

" 'I came for that,' I said.

" 'The locket? So did I,' he said. And then added quite simply, 'My picture is in it.'

" 'You lie!' I whispered, shaken by a wind of fury. And yet I knew that perhaps he did not lie, that what he said might well be true. Perhaps that was the cause of my fury.

"His face was lined with a grief and weariness terrible to behold. To look at him you would have thought that there was nothing else in the world for him except grief. It was a great grief that made him careless of everything else.

" 'It is my picture,' he said. 'She loved me.'

" 'I say that you lie,' I repeated. 'She may have played with you—but she never loved any one but me—in her heart she never did!'

" 'You!' And because he whispered, hissing out the words, they seemed to gain in intensity of scorn. 'You! She hated you! You who neglected her, you with your damned eternal politics, you who could never understand her—love? You who could never give her the things a woman needs and must have—the warmth—the color—the romance—the poetry of life! You!—with your cold-blooded humanitarianism! I tell you, she loved *me!* Why should I hesitate to avow it to you? It is the sweetest thing on earth to me, that she loved me! She turned from you to me because——'

" 'Don't go into all that,' I said. 'I heard all about that last night—from her! Open the locket, and let us see whose face is there!'

"He opened it, and dropped the locket. He reeled against the wall, with his hands over his face, as if he had been struck a physical blow.

"I picked the toy up and looked at it.

"The face in the locket was neither his face nor mine. It was the face of—of the man who ran from the pergola and vaulted over the orchard wall into the woods that summer night a year earlier; the man whom I had not, for the moment, recognized.

"We stood there, this man who had been my best friend and I, with the locket between us, and I debated whether to strike him down——"

The narrator paused. And then he said, fixing Dr. Beaulieu with an intent gaze:

"Should I have struck him down? You, who are a teacher of ethics, who set yourself up to be, after a fashion, a preacher, a priest, a spiritual director, tell me, would I have been justified if I had killed him?"

Dr. Beaulieu seemed to shrink, seemed to contract and grow smaller, physically, under the other man's look. He opened his mouth as if to articulate, but for a second or two no word came. And then, regaining something of his usual poise, he said, although his voice was a bit husky:

"No! It is for the Creator of life to take life, and no other. Hatred and strife are disharmony,

and bring their own punishment by throwing the soul out of unity with the spirit of love which rules the universe."

It sounded stereotyped and emotionless, even in Dr. Beaulieu's own ears, as he said it; there was a mocking gleam in the eyes of the other man that spoke of a far more vital and genuine emotion. Dr. Beaulieu licked his lips and there came a knot in his forehead; beads of perspiration stood out upon his brow.

"You were right," said Dr. Beaulieu, "in not striking him down. You were right in sparing him."

The bearded man laughed. "I did not say that I spared him," he said.

Dr. Beaulieu looked a question; a question that, perhaps, he dared not utter; or at least that he did not care to utter. He had dropped completely his rôle of spiritual counselor; he regarded his visitor with an emotion that might have been horror and might have been terror, or might have been a mixture of the two. The visitor replied to the unspoken interrogation in the healer's manner.

"I did not strike him down. Neither did I spare him. I waited and I—I used him. I know how to wait; I am of the nature that can wait. It was years before fate drew all things together for my purpose, and gave him into my hands—fate, assisted by myself.

"I waited, and I used him. The details are not pertinent for it is not his story that I am telling.

I piloted him to the brink of destruction, and then —then, I saved him."

"You saved him?" Dr. Beaulieu was puzzled; but his fear, if fear it was, had not abated. There was a frank menace, now, in his visitor's air. And the healer seemed to be struggling, as he listened to the tale, to force some reluctant brain-cell to unlock and give its stored memories to his conscious mind.

"I saved him. I saved him to be my creature. I broke him, and I saved him. I made him my slave, my dog, my—my anything I choose to have him. I have work for him to do."

Again the man paused, looking about the rich profusion of Dr. Beaulieu's studio. There was a table in the room which contained a number of curios from Eastern lands. The visitor suddenly rose from his chair and picked from among them a thin, keen-bladed dagger. It was a beautiful weapon, of some Oriental make; beautiful in its lines; beautiful with the sullen fire of many jewels blazing in its hilt—an evil levin that got into the mind and led the thoughts astray even as the dainty deadliness of the whole tool seduced the hand to grasp and strike. As his visitor, strangely breaking the flow of his narrative, examined and handled the thing, Dr. Beaulieu shuddered.

"The man is as much my tool," said the visitor slowly, "as this dagger would be your tool, Dr. Beaulieu, if you chose to thrust it into my breast—or into your own."

He laid the dagger down on the table, and resumed his seat. Dr. Beaulieu said nothing, but he found it difficult to withdraw his eyes from his visitor's steady stare. Slumped and sagged within his chair, he said nothing. Presently the visitor went on.

"I had a fancy, Dr. Beaulieu; I had a fancy! It suited me to make my revenge a less obvious thing than striking down the old friend who had betrayed my love and confidence, a less obvious thing than striking down the other man—the man whose face was in the locket."

As he spoke he took from his pocket a locket. He opened it, and gazed upon the face. The healer half rose from his chair, and then sank back, with a hoarse, inarticulate murmur. His face had turned livid, and he trembled in every limb. It was evident that the missing scene which he had sought before had suddenly been flashed upon the cinema screen of his recollection. He remembered, now——

"It was my fancy, Dr. Beaulieu, to make one of them take revenge upon the other, that I might thus be revenged upon them both."

He suddenly rose, and forced the locket into the healer's nerveless grasp.

"That face—look at it!" he cried, towering over the collapsed figure before him.

Compelled by a will stronger than his own, Dr. Beaulieu looked. It was the counterfeit presentment of himself within. It fell from his trembling

fingers and rolled upon the floor. The cultist buried his face in his hands.

The other man stepped back and regarded him sardonically for a moment or two.

"I should not wonder," he said, "if the man who used to be my best friend would pay you a visit before long—perhaps in an hour, perhaps in a week, perhaps in a month."

He picked up the dagger again, and toyed with it.

"This thing," he said, impersonally, trying the point upon his finger, "is sharp. It would give a quick death, a sure death, an almost painless death, if one used it against another man—or against one's self."

And without another word he turned and left the room.

Dr. Beaulieu sat and listened to his retreating footsteps. And, long after they had ceased to sound, Dr. Beaulieu still sat and listened. Perhaps he was listening for some one to come, now that the bearded man had left. He sat and listened, and presently he reached over to the table and picked up the dagger that the visitor had laid down with its handle toward him. He pressed its point against his finger, as the other man had done. It was sharp. It would give, as the fellow had said, "a quick death, a sure death, an almost painless death."

And as he whispered these words he was still listening—listening—waiting for some one to come——

XI.—The Locked Box

XI.—The Locked Box

I

It was a small, oblong affair, not more than three inches wide or deep, by twice that much in length, made of some dark, hard wood; brass bound and with brass lock and brass hinges; altogether such a box as a woman might choose to keep about her room for any one of a half dozen possible uses.

Clarke did not remember that he had ever seen it prior to his unexpectedly early return from a western trip of a month's duration. He thought he would give his wife a pleasant surprise, so he did not telephone the news of his arrival to the house, but went home and entered her room unannounced. As he came in his wife hastily slipped something into the box, locked it, and put it into one of the drawers of her desk. Then she came to meet him, and he would not have thought of the matter at all had it not been for just the slightest trace of confusion in her manner.

She was glad to see him. She always was after his absences, but it seemed to him that she was

exceptionally so this time. She had never been a demonstrative woman; but it seemed to Clarke that she came nearer that description on the occasion of this home-coming than ever before. They had a deal to say to each other, and it was not until after dinner that the picture of his wife hurriedly disposing of the box crossed Clarke's consciousness again. Even then he mentioned it casually because they were talked out of more important topics rather than because of any very sharp curiosity. He asked her what it was; what was in it.

"Oh, nothing!—nothing of any importance—nothing at all," she said; and moved over to the piano and began one of his favorite airs. And he forgot the box again in an instant. She had always been able to make Clarke forget things, when she wanted to. But the next day it suddenly came to him, out of that nowhere-in-particular from which thoughts come to mortals, that she had been almost as much confused at his sudden question as she had at his previous sudden entrance.

Clarke was not a suspicious person; not even a very curious one, as a rule. But it was so evident to him that there was something in that box which his wife did not wish him to see that he could not help but wonder. Always frank with her, and always accustomed to an equal candor on her part, it occurred to him that he would ask her again, in something more than a casual way, and that

she would certainly tell him, at the same time clearing up her former hesitation. But no!—why should he ask her? That would be to make something out of nothing; this was a trifle, and not worth thinking about. But he continued thinking about it, nevertheless. . . .

Ah, he had it! What a chump he had been, not to guess it sooner! His birthday was only ten days off, and his wife had been planning to surprise him with a remembrance of some sort. Of course! That accounted for the whole thing.

With this idea in his head, he said nothing more about the box, but waited. And when dinner was over and they sat before the fire together, on the evening of the anniversary, he still forbore to mention it, expecting every moment that the next she would present him with the token. But as the evening wore away, with no sign on her part, he finally broke an interval of silence with the remark:

"Well, dear, don't keep me guessing any longer! Bring it to me!"

"Guessing? Bring you—what?" And he could see that she was genuinely puzzled.

"Why, my birthday present."

"Why, my dear boy! And did you expect one? And I had forgotten! Positively forgotten—it *is* your birthday, isn't it, Dickie! If I had only known you *wanted* one——" And she came up and kissed him, with something like contrition, although his birthday had never been one of the

sentimental anniversaries which she felt bound to observe with gifts.

"Don't feel bad about it—I don't care, you know—really," he said. "Only, I thought you had something of the sort in that brass-bound box—that was the only reason I mentioned it."

"Brass-bound box—why, no, I—I forgot it. I'm ashamed of myself, but I forgot the date entirely!"

But she volunteered no explanation of what the box contained, although the opportunity was so good a one.

And Clarke wondered more than ever.

What could it be? The letters of some former sweetheart? Well, all girls had sweethearts before they married, he supposed; at least all men did. He had had several himself. There was nothing in that. And he would not make an ass of himself by saying any more about it.

Only . . . he could not remember any old sweethearts that he wouldn't have told Agnes all about, if she had asked him. He had no secrets from her. But she had a secret from him . . . innocent enough, of course. But still, a secret. There was none of those old sweethearts of his whose letters he cared to keep after five years of marriage. And there was no . . . But, steady! Where were his reflections leading him? Into something very like suspicion? Positively, yes; to the verge of it. Until Agnes got ready to tell him all about it, he would forget that damned box!

And if she never got ready, why, that was all right, too. She was his wife, and he loved her . . . and that settled it.

Perhaps that should have settled it, but it did not. Certain healthy-looking, fleshy specimens of humanity are said to succumb the quickest to pneumonia, and it may be that the most ingenuous natures suffer the most intensely with suspicion, when once thoroughly inoculated.

II

Clarke fought against it, cursing his own baseness. But the very effort necessary to the fight showed him the persistence of the thing itself. He loved his wife, and trusted her, he told himself over and over again, and in all their relations hitherto there had never been the slightest deviation from mutual confidence and understanding. What did he suspect? He could not have told himself. He went over their life together in his mind. In the five years of their married life, he could not have helped but notice that men were attracted to her. Of course they were. That was natural. She was a charming woman. He quite approved of it; it reflected credit upon him, in a way. He was not a Bluebeard of a husband, to lock a wife up and deny her the society proper to her years. And her very catholicity of taste, the perfect frankness of her enjoyment of masculine attention, had but served to make his confidence all

the more complete. True, he had never thought she loved him as much as he loved her . . . but now that he came to think of it, was there not a warmer quality to her affection since his return from this last trip west? Was there not a kind of thoughtfulness, was there not a watchful increase in attentiveness, that he had always missed before? Was she not making love to him every day now; just as he had always made love to her before? Were not the parts which they had played for the five years of their married life suddenly reversed? They were! Indeed they were! And what did that mean? What did that portend? Did the brass-bound box have aught to do with that? What was the explanation of this change?

The subtle imp of suspicion turned this matter of the exchanged rôles into capital. Clarke, still ashamed of himself for doing it, began covertly to watch his wife; to set traps of various kinds for her. He said nothing more about the box, but within six months after the first day upon which he had seen it, it became the constant companion of his thoughts.

What did he suspect? Not even now could he have said. He suspected nothing definite; vaguely, he suspected anything and everything. If his wife noticed his changed manner towards her, she made no sign. If anything, her efforts to please him, her attentiveness, her thoughtfulness in small things, increased.

III

There came a day when he could stand this self-torture no longer, he thought. He came home from his office—Clarke was a partner in a prosperous real-estate concern—at an hour when he thought his wife not yet returned from an afternoon of call making, determined to end the matter once for all.

He went to her room, found the key to her desk, and opened the drawer. He found the box, but it was locked, and he began rummaging through the drawers, and among the papers and letters therein, for the key.

Perhaps she carried it with her. Very well, then, he would break it open! With the thing in his hand he began to look around for something with which to force the fastenings, and was about deciding that he would take it down to the basement, and use the hatchet, when he heard a step. He turned, just as his wife entered the room.

Her glance traveled from the box in his hand to the ransacked desk, and rested there inquiringly for a moment. Strangely enough, in view of the fact that he felt himself an injured husband and well within his rights, it was Clarke who became confused, apologetic, and evasive under her gaze. He essayed a clumsy lie:

"Agnes," he began, indicating the desk, "I—I got a bill to-day from Meigs and Horner, for those furs, you know—I was sure that the account had

been settled—that you had paid them, and had shown me the receipt—that you had paid them from your allowance, you know—and I thought I would come home and look up the receipt."

It was very lame; and very lamely done, at that, as he felt even while he was doing it. But it gave him an opportunity of setting the box down on the desk almost in a casual manner, as if he had picked it up quite casually, while he began to tumble the papers again with his hands.

"The receipt is here," she said; and got it for him.

The box lay between them, but they did not look at it, nor at each other, and they both trembled with agitation.

Each knew that the thoughts of the other were on nothing except that little locked receptacle of wood and brass, yet neither one referred to it; and for a full half minute they stood with averted faces, and fumbling hands, and played out the deception.

Finally she looked full at him, and drew a long breath, as if the story were coming now; and there was in her manner a quality of softness—almost of sentimentality, Clarke felt. She was getting ready to try and melt him into a kind of sympathy for her frailty, was she! Well, that would not work with him! And with the receipted bill waving in his hand, he made it the text of a lecture on extravagance, into which he plunged with vehemence.

Why did he not let her speak? He would not admit the real reason to himself, just then. But in his heart he was afraid to have her go on. Afraid, either way it turned. If she were innocent of any wrong, he would have made an ass of himself—and much worse than an ass. If she were guilty, she might melt him into a weak forgiveness in spite of her guilt! No, she must not speak . . . not now! If she were innocent, how could he confess his suspicions to her and acknowledge his baseness? And besides . . . women were so damned clever . . . whatever *was* in that box, she might fool him about it, somehow!

And then, "Good God!" he thought, "I have got to the place where I hug my suspicion to me as a dearer thing than my love, have I? Have I got so low as that?"

While these thoughts raced and rioted through his mind, his lips were feverishly pouring out torrents in denunciation of feminine extravagance. Even as he spoke he felt the black injustice of his speech, for he had always encouraged his wife, rather than otherwise, in the expenditure of money; his income was a good one; and the very furs which formed the text of his harangue he had helped her selĕct and even urged upon her.

It was their first quarrel, if that can be called a quarrel which has only one side to it. For she listened in silence, with white lips and hurt eyes, and a face that was soon set into a semblance of hard indifference. He stormed out of the room,

ashamed of himself, and feeling that he had disgraced the name of civilization.

IV

Ashamed of himself, indeed; but before the angel of contrition could take full possession of his nature, the devil of suspicion, the imp of the box, regained its place.

For why had she not answered him? She knew he cared nothing about the trivial bill, the matter of the furs, he told himself. Why had she not insisted on a hearing, and told him about the box? She knew as well as he that that was what he had broken into her desk to get!

Justice whispered that she had been about to speak, and that he had denied her the chance. But the imp of the box said that an honest woman would have *demanded* the chance—would have persisted until she got it! And thus, his very shame, and anger at himself, were cunningly turned and twisted by the genius of the brass-bound box into a confirmation of his suspicions.

V

Suspicions? Nay, convictions! Beliefs. Certainties!

They were certainties, now! Certainties to Clarke's mind, at least. For in a month after this episode he had become a silent monomaniac on

the subject of the brass-bound box. He felt shame no longer. She was guilty. Of just what, he did not know. But guilty. Guilty as Hell itself, he told himself, rhetorically, in one of the dumb rages which now became so frequent with him.

Guilty—guilty—guilty—the clock on the mantelpiece ticked off many dragging hours of intolerable minutes to that tune, while Clarke lay awake and listened. *Guilty—guilty—guilty*—repeat any word often enough, and it will hypnotize you. *Guilty—guilty—guilty*—so he and the clock would talk to each other, back and forth, the whole night through. If any suggestions of his former, more normal habits of thought came to him now it was they that were laughed out of court; it was they that were flung away and scorned as traitors.

She was guilty. But he would be crafty! He would be cunning. He would make no mistake. He would allow her no subterfuge. He would give her no chance to snare him back into a condition of half belief. There should be no juggling explanations. They were clever as the devil, women were! But this one should have no chance to fool him again. She had fooled him too long already.

And she kept trying to fool him. Shortly after his outburst over the furs, she began again a series of timid advances which would have struck him as pathetic had he not known that her whole nature

was corroded and corrupted with deceit, with abominable deceit. She was trying to make him believe that she did not know why he was angry and estranged, was she? He would show her! He hated her now, with that restless, burning intensity of hatred known only to him who has injured another. A hatred that consumed his own vitality, and made him sick in soul and body. The little sleep he got was passed in uneasy dreams of his revenge; and his waking hours were devoted to plots and plans of the form which it should take. Oh, but she had been cunning to fool him for so long; but she should see! She should see! When the time for action came, she should see!

VI

Something, one tense and feverish midnight, when he lay in his bed snarling and brooding and chuckling—a kind of snapping sense in some remote interior chamber of his brain, followed by a nervous shock that made him sit upright—warned him that the time for action was at hand. What is it that makes sinners, at provincial revival meetings, suddenly aware that the hours of dalliance are past and the great instant that shall send them to "the mourners' bench" is at hand? Somehow, they seem to know! And, somehow, Clarke felt an occult touch and knew that his time for action had arrived.

He did not care what came afterwards. Any

jury in the world, so he told himself, ought to acquit him of his deed, when they once knew his story; when they once looked at the damning evidence of her guilt which she had hidden away for so long in the brass-bound box. But if they did *not* acquit him, that was all right, too. His work in the world would have been done; he would have punished a guilty woman. He would have shown that all men are not fools.

But he did not spend a great deal of thought on how other people would regard what he was about to do. As he crept down the hall with the knife in his hand, his chief sensation was a premonitory itch, a salty tang of pleasure in the doing of the deed itself. When hatred comes in where love has gone out, there may be a kind of voluptuary delight in the act of murder.

Very carefully he opened the door of her room. And then he smiled to himself, and entered noisily; for what was the need of being careful about waking up a woman who was already dead? He did not care whether he killed her in her sleep or not; —indeed, if she wakened and begged for her life, he thought it might add a certain zest to the business. He should enjoy hearing her plead. He would not mind prolonging things.

But things were not prolonged. His hand and the muscles of his forearm had tensed so often with the thought, with the idea, that the first blow went home. She never waked.

VII

He got the box, and opened it.

Inside was a long envelope, and written on that were the words:

"To be opened by my husband only after my death."

That time had come!

Within the envelope was a letter. It was dated on the day of his return from his western trip, a few months before. He read:

"Dick, I love you!

"Does it seem strange to you that I should write it down?

"Listen, Dickie dear—I *had* to write it! I couldn't tell you when I was alive—but I just had to tell you, too. And now that I am dead, what I say will come to you with all of its sweetness increased; and all of its bitterness left out! It will, now that I am dead—or if you die first, you will never see this. This is from beyond the grave to you, Dickie dear, to make all your life good to you afterwards!

"Now, listen, dear, and don't be hard on me.

"When I married you, Dickie, I *didn't* love you! You were wild about me. But I only *liked* you very much. It wasn't *really* love. It wasn't what you *deserved.* But I was only a girl, and you were the first man, and I didn't know things; I didn't know what I *should have* felt.

"Later, when I realized how very much you cared, I was ashamed of myself. I grew to see that I had done wrong in marrying you. Wrong to both of us. For no woman should marry a man she doesn't love. And I was ashamed, and worried about it. You were so good to me! So sweet—and you never suspected that I didn't care like I should. And because you were so good and sweet to me, I felt *worse.* And I made up my mind you should *never* know! That I would be everything to you any woman could be. I tried to be a good wife. Wasn't I, Dickie, even then?

"But I prayed and prayed and prayed. 'O God,' I used to say, 'let me love him like he loves me!' It was five years, Dickie, and I *liked* you more, and *admired* you more, and saw more in you that was worth while, every week; but still, no miracle happened.

"And then one morning *a miracle did happen!*

"It was when you were on that trip West. I had gone to bed thinking how kind and dear you were. I missed you, Dickie dear, and *needed* you. And when I woke up, there was a change over the world. I felt so different, somehow. It had come! Wasn't it wonderful, Dickie?—it had come! And I sang all that day for joy. I could hardly wait for you to come home so that I could tell you. I loved you, loved you, loved you, Dickie, *as you deserved!* My prayers had been answered, somehow—or maybe it was what any woman would do just living near you and being with you.

"And then I saw *I couldn't tell you, after all!*

"For if I told you I loved you *now,* that would

be to tell you that for five years *I hadn't loved you,* Dickie!

"And how would *that* make you feel? Wouldn't that have been like a knife, Dickie?

"Oh, I wanted you to know! *How* I wanted you to know! But, you see, I couldn't tell you, could I, dear, without telling the other, too? I just *had* to save you from that! And I just had to make you feel it, somehow or other. And I *will* make you feel it, Dickie!

"But I can't tell you. Who knows what ideas you might get into your head about those five years, if I told you now? Men are so queer, and they can be so stupid sometimes! And I can't bear to think of losing one smallest bit of your love . . . not now! It would *kill* me!

"But I want you to know, sometime. And so I'm writing you—it's my first love letter—the first real one, Dickie. If *you* die first, I'll tell you in Heaven. And if *I* die first, you'll understand!

"AGNES."

XII.—Behind the Curtain

XII.—Behind the Curtain

It was as dark as the belly of the fish that swallowed Jonah. A drizzling rain blanketed the earth in chill discomfort. As I splashed and struggled along the country road, now in the beaten path, and now among the wet weeds by its side, I had never more heartily yearned for the dullness and comforts of respectability. Here was I with more talents in my quiver, it pleased me to think, than nine out of ten of the burghers I had left sleeping snug and smug in the town a few miles behind; with as much real love of humanity as the next man, too; and yet shivering and cursing my way into another situation that might well mean my death. And all for what? For fame or riches? No, for little more than a mere existence, albeit free from responsibility. Indeed, I was all but ready to become an honest man then and there, to turn back and give up the night's adventure, had but my imagination furnished me with the picture of some occupation whereby I might gain the same leisure and independence as by what your precisians call thieving.

With the thought I stumbled off the road again, and into a narrow gully that splashed me to the knees with muddy water. Out of that, I walked

plump into a hedge, and when I sought to turn from it at right angles, I found myself still following its line. This circumstance showed me that I was come unaware upon the sharp turn of the road which marked the whereabouts of the house that was my object. Following the hedge, I found the entrance to the graveled driveway within a hundred yards of my last misstep, and entered the grounds. I groped about me for a space, not daring to show a light, until presently a blacker bulk, lifting itself out of the night's comprehensive blackness, indicated the house itself, to my left and a bit in front of me. I left the moist gravel—for there is nothing to be gained on an expedition of this sort by advertising the size and shape of your boots to a morbidly inquisitive public—and reached the shelter of the veranda by walking across the lawn.

There, being out of eyeshot from the upper windows, I risked a gleam from my pocket lantern, one of those little electric affairs that are occasionally useful to others than night watchmen. Two long French windows gave on the veranda; and, as I knew, both of them opened from the reception hall. A bit of a way with the women is not amiss in my profession; and the little gray-eyed Irish maid, who had told me three weeks before of old man Rolfe's stinginess and brutality towards the young wife whom he had cooped up here for the past four years, had also given me, bit by bit, other information more valuable than

she could guess. So, thanks to the maid, I was aware that the safe where the Rolfe jewels were kept—and often a substantial bit of money as well—was situated in the library; which was just beyond the hall and connected with it by a flight of four or five steps. This safe was my objective point.

The wooden window shutters were but the work of a moment; and the window fastenings themselves of only a few minutes more. (I flatter myself that I have a very coaxing way with window fasteners.) The safe itself would give me the devil's own trouble, I knew. It was really a job for two men, and I ached all over to be at it, to be safely through with it, and away, a good hour before sunrise.

The window opened noiselessly enough, and I stepped within and set my little satchel full of necessary tools upon the floor. But the damp weather had swelled the woodwork, and as I closed the window again, though I pushed it ever so gently, it gave forth a noise something between a grunt and a squeak.

And as pat as the report of a pistol to the pressure of the trigger came the answer—a sound of a quickly-caught breath from the warm dimness of the room. I made no motion; though the blood drummed desperately through my brain and my scalp tingled with apprehension and excitement.

For ten, for twenty, for thirty seconds I stood so; and then the silence was broken by the unmis-

takable rustle of a woman's skirts. The sound came softly towards me through the darkness. It was my turn to let loose my held breath with a gasp, and in another moment I should have been through the window and running for it; when a woman's whisper halted me.

"Is that you, Charles? And why did you not rap upon the shutter?"

So some one called Charles was expected? Then, ticked off my thoughts almost automatically, the lady somewhere near me in the dark might have her own reasons for not caring to alarm the house just then! The thought steadied me to action.

"Shh," I whispered, feeling behind me for the window, and gradually opening it again. "S-h-h! No, it is not Charles"—and I put one foot backward across the sill. "It is not Charles, but Charles has sent me to say——"

Click!—went something by the window, and the room was flooded with sudden brilliance from a dozen electric globes. And again, click!—and I looked with blinking eyes at the muzzle of a cocked pistol held by the most beautiful, the most bejeweled, the most determined-looking young woman it has ever been my lot to meet.

"Who are you?" she asked in a voice that was at once hoarse and sweet. "Who are you? And what do you want? And where is Charles?"

As I stood there dripping moisture upon the oiled floor, with my hands in the air—they had

gone up quite involuntarily—I must have been the very picture of idiocy and discomfiture. I wondered if Charles, whoever the devil Charles might be, was always welcomed with a cocked pistol. Probably not; but, I wondered, how did she happen to have a pistol with her? I wondered why neck, breast, hair, arms, and hands should be ablaze with the diamonds that accentuated her lithe and vivid loveliness. I wondered why, now that she saw I was not Charles, she did not alarm the house. I wondered everything; but nothing to the point. And as I stood wondering she repeated:

"Who are you? And what do you want?"

"Madame," I stammered, my jarred brain fastening upon the sentence she had interrupted, "Charles sent me to—to say to you——"

"Charles who?" she asked. And as tense as was her face, a gleam of merriment shot through her eyes. "Charles who?" she repeated.

Charles was not one of the points upon which the Irish maid had given me information.

The lady with the pistol considered for a moment. "You are not very clever, are you?" she said.

"If you will pardon me," I said, "I think I had better be going. I seem to have mistaken the house."

"You at least seem to have mistaken the proper manner in which to enter it," she returned.

"Why, as to the mode of entrance," I said, "I

might plead that the mistake appears to have been less in that than in the person who employed it."

I could not resist the retort. A dull red crept slowly up her neck and face; a pallid, olive-tinted face, beautiful in itself, beautiful for its oval contour and broad brow, and frame of black hair; beautiful in itself, and yet dominated and outdone by the lustrous, restless beauty of the dark eyes wherewith she held me more surely captive than by virtue of the pistol.

"You will come in," she said, "and sit there." She indicated a seat beside a central table. "But first you will kindly let me have whatever weapons you may possess." She took my revolver, examined it, and put her own in the breast of her gown. "Now you may put your hands down," she said, "your arms must ache by now. Sit down."

I sat. She stood and looked at me for a moment.

"I am wondering what you are going to do with me," I ventured.

In all of her quick actions, and in the tones of her voice, there was evident a most unnatural sort of strain. She may well have been excited; that was only to be expected in the circumstances. But the repressed excitement in this woman's manner was not that of a woman who is forcing herself to keep her courage up; not that of a woman who would like to scream; but a steadier nervous energy which seemed to burn in her like a fire, to escape from her finger tips, and almost to crackle in her

hair; an intensity that was vibrant. I marveled. Most women would have screamed at the advent of a man in the dead of night; screamed and fainted. Or the ones who would not, and who were armed as she, would ordinarily have been inclined to shoot, and at once; or immediately to have given the alarm. She had done none of these things. She had merely taken me captive. She had set me down in a chair at the center of the room. She had not roused the house. And now she stood looking at me with a trace of abstraction in her manner; looking at me, for the moment, less as if I were a human being than as if I were a factor in some mathematical problem which it was the immediate task of that active, high-keyed brain of hers to solve. And there was a measure of irony in her glance, as if she alone tasted and enjoyed some ulterior jest.

"I am wondering," I repeated, "what you are going to do with me."

She sat down at the opposite side of the table before she replied.

"I believe," she said slowly, "that I have nearly made up my mind what to do with you."

"Well?" I asked.

But she said nothing, and continued to say nothing. I looked at her and her diamonds—the diamonds I had come after!—and wondered again why she was wearing them; wondered why she had tricked herself out as for some grand entertainment. And as the ignominious result of my

night's expedition pressed more sharply against my pride I could have strangled her through sheer disappointment and mortification. The pistol she held was the answer to that impulse. But what was the answer to her hesitancy in alarming the house? Why did she not give me up and be done with me?

At the farther end of the room was a long red curtain, which covered the entrance to a sitting-room or parlor, as I guessed; and by the side of the curtain hung an old-fashioned bell cord, also of red, which I supposed to communicate with the servants' quarters. It were easy enough, now that she had taken the whip hand of me so cleverly, to pull that rope, to set the bell jangling, to rouse the house. Why did she not do so?

Was she a mad woman? There was that in her inexplicable conduct, and in her highly-wrought, yet governed, mood, as she sat in brooding silence across the table from me, to make the theory plausible. Brooding she was, and studying me, I thought; yet watchful, too. For at any least motion of mine her hand tightened slightly upon the pistol. We sat thus while the slow seconds lengthened into intolerable minutes; and I steamed with sweat, and fidgeted. Nor was I set more at my ease by her long searching glances. In fact, my overthrow had been so instant and so complete that my scattered wits had never drawn themselves together again; I continued as one in a haze; as a person half under the power of the hypnotist; as

a mouse must feel after the first blow of the cat's paw. And yet one idea began to loom clearly out of that haze and possess me—the idea that she desired the alarm to be given as little as I did myself.

But there was no light in that. It was easy to understand why she did not wish the house aroused while she still believed me to be Charles—whoever Charles might be. But now?—it was too much for me. I could not find a justification in reason for my belief; and yet the conviction grew.

She broke the silence with a question that might have been put with full knowledge of my thought.

"You are still wondering why I do not give you up?" she said.

I nodded. She leaned towards me across the table, and if ever the demons of mockery danced through a woman's eyes it was then; and her lips parted in a kind of silent laughter.

She touched the diamonds about her throat.

"It was these you came after?"

I nodded again. Evidently speech was of no avail with this lady. She asked questions at her will, and reserved the right of answering none.

"Tell me," she said, "Why are you a thief? Why do you steal?"

" 'Convey, the wise it call,' " I quoted. "Accident, or fate, or destiny, I suppose," I went on, wondering more than ever at the question, but with a fluttering hope. Perhaps the lady (in spite of Charles—such things have been!) was an

amateur sociologist, a crank reformer, or something of that sort. There had been no mockery in her tone when she asked the question; instead, I thought, a kind of pity. "Fate, or destiny," I went on, "or what you please, 'There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will,' " I quoted again, in my best actor manner.

"Why," she said, "you are a man with some air of better things about you. You quote Shakespeare as if he were an old friend. And yet, you are a thief! Tell me," she continued, "tell me—I dare say there were many struggles against that destiny?" There was a note almost of eagerness in her voice, as if she were a leniently-inclined judge who would fain search out and put in the mouth of a condemned man some plausible plea for the exercise of clemency. "Come—were there not?—I dare say there were—circumstances of uncommon bitterness that forced you to become what I see you? And even now you hate the thing you are?"

"Why, as to that," I said, possessed of the sudden whim to be honest with myself for once, "I am afraid that I can complain of no bitterer usage at the hands of the world than can the majority of those who reap where they have not sowed. When I think of it all, I am used to putting it to myself that my life is devoted to a kind of private warfare against the unjust conditions of a hypocritical social order."

"Warfare!" she flouted, hard and brilliant as

one of her own diamonds again. "And you could justify it, too, could you not?"

And then she asked me: "Have you ever killed a man?"

"Why, no," said I, "but I have tried to."

"He lived?—and you were sorry that he lived?"

"No," I said, quite out of my depths in all this moral quibbling, "I was glad he lived."

"And yet you hated him?"

"I would have taken his life in a rage," I said. "He had wronged me as greatly as one man can wrong another."

"And yet you were glad he lived? My dear thief——"

"Higgins is the name," said I. "You may call me Higgins."

"My dear Higgins," she went on, "you are inconsistent. You attempt to slay a man in what I should judge to have been a not ignoble passion. It may have been an anger that did you credit. And yet you are not bold enough to face the thought of killing him. You are glib with justifications of your thievery; and perhaps that is also because you are too much of a coward to look steadily at it. You creep along a mean and despicable path in life, contentedly, it seems to me, with a dead soul. You are what you are because there is nothing positive in you for either good or evil. You are negative; you were better dead. Yes, better dead!"

Why should I have felt as if she were seeking self-justification in advance for some death she planned for me? Certainly, my life, or death, was not hers to give or take; she might give me up, and probably would. But just as certainly she had made me feel, as she passed her judgment upon me, that she was likely to turn executioner as well as judge. My doubts as to her sanity returned.

"Still," I said, for the sake of saying something, "if I killed a man, I should not like to think about it, even if he deserved death."

"Even if he deserved death?" she repeated, and sprang up, as if the phrase had touched her. "You make yourself the judge, you do, of when a man 'deserves' to lose his wealth. Come, what is your idea of when he deserves to die?"

Up and down the room she swept; yet still watchful. And the emotion which she had so long suppressed burst out into a poisonous lovely bloom that suffused her being with an awful beauty.

"When does he deserve to die?" she repeated. "Listen to me. I knew a woman once—no matter where—no matter when—who was sold—sold! I say—by the sordid devil she called her father, to the veriest beast that ever trod this earth. Her beauty—for she had beauty—her wit—for wit she had—became this husband's chattels before she turned her twentieth year. She would never have loved him, but she would have been faithful to him—she was faithful to him, in fact, in spite of

all his drunkenness and bestiality—and abuse! It was not neglect alone that she had to complain of—she had never looked for understanding or sympathy. But she had not looked for abuse. Abuse, I say, and worse than abuse. Before she had been married a year she knew what it was, not only to feel the weight of a heavy hand and to hide the bruises from her maid, but to see other women brought into her very house. Pah!—hate? She hated him? Hate is not the word. She became a live coal. But she never cried out; she found strength to smile at him even when he beat her; she was proud enough for that. It pleased him, in his hellish humor, and because she was made to shine, to cage her in a country house, and there to taunt her that although she was sold to him she got little of what money may buy. And still she smiled at him, and still her hatred grew through all the weeks and months until it filled her whole being. And then—love came. For God has ordained that love may enter even Hell. Love, I say; and she loved this lover of hers with a passion that was measured only by the degree in which she hated her husband. And she would have left with him; but on the very night they would have flown together her lord and master——"

She said the words with an indescribable spluttering sneer, sidewise from her mouth. It is so a lioness may snarl and spit before she leaps.

"Her—lord and master—found it out, and

waited up to catch them; and coming upon her alone, taunted her. Taunted her, and struck her——"

"Look!" she cried, and tore the diamonds from her breast, and rent the laces, and wrenched the fastenings apart. A new red weal that seemed to throb and pulse with her respiration stood out from the whiteness of her bosom.

"Tell me," she whispered hoarsely, "would it have been murder if she had killed that man? Which were the more courageous thing—to kill him, or to step back into her living hell? If she had killed him, would she have regretted it?"

I know not what I might have answered; but at that instant three raps sounded distinctly upon the window-shutter. I leaped to my feet. Then Charles had come!

An instant she stood as if stricken to a statue in mid-rage.

And then she cried out, and there was a furious triumph in her voice—a kind of joy that matched itself to, and blended with, the fierce and reckless beauty of her shaken jewels, possessed her.

"Charles," she cried, "come in! Come in!"

Slowly the window opened and a man entered. He drew back in amaze at the sight of me, and turned to her with an air that was all one question.

"I thought you would never come," she said.

He was a big blond man, and as he turned from the one to the other of us, with his helpless, in-

quiring face, and eyes that blinked from the outer darkness, he looked oddly like a sleepy schoolboy who has been awakened from an afternoon nap by the teacher's ruler.

"Katherine," he finally stammered, "what is this? Who is this man?" He passed his hand across his forehead as one may do who doubts whether or not he dreams; and walked towards the table.

"Charles," she said, "I have shot the old man."

I have seen a beef stricken on the head with a mallet look at its executioner with big eyes for an instant before the quivering in its limbs set in and it sank to the ground. So this Charles looked with wide, stupid eyes, and shivered, and dropped the great bulk of him into a chair. His head sank upon his hand. But finally he looked up, and spoke in a confused voice, as if through a mist.

"Good God, Katherine, what do you mean?"

"I mean," she said, framing the words slowly, as one speaks a lesson to a child, "I mean that I have killed the old man."

And moving swiftly across the room she flung back the heavy red curtain at the end of it; and I saw the answer to my many questionings.

The body lay upon its back, with one arm bent, the hand across the chest, and the fingers spread wide. The face was that of a man of sixty or thereabouts, but, indeed, so deeply lined and wrinkled and pouched with evil living that the age even in life must have been hard to determine. Blood

was coagulating about a bullet wound in the temple, and there were powder burns on the forehead. The shot had been fired at close range, evidently from the weapon with which I had been confronted on my entrance; and the sound had been so muffled in the curtain that it was little wonder that the servants in the rooms above, and across the house, had not heard it. He had a monstrous nose, that man upon the floor, and it must have been a red nose in life; but now it was of a bluish-white color, like the skin of an old and scrawny fowl. That, and the thin, drawn-up legs, and the big flabby paunch of the thing, robbed the sight, for me, of all the solemnity which (we are taught) exudes from the presence of death. It made me sick; and yet I cackled with sheer hysteria, too; or rather my strained nerves jarred and laughed, if not myself. It was too damned grotesque.

Herself, she did not look at it. She looked at the man called Charles; and he, with a shudder, lifted his slow gaze from the thing behind the curtain to her face.

She was the first to speak, and the terrible joy with which she had bade Charles to enter still dominated her accents.

"Don't you understand, Charles? This man," and she indicated me with the pistol, "this man takes the blame of this. He is a thief. He came just after—just afterwards. And I held him for your coming. Don't you see? Don't you see? His presence clears us of this deed!"

"Us?" queried Charles.

"Not *us?"* she asked.

"My God, Katherine," he burst forth, "why did you do this thing? And you would heap murder on murder! Why, why, why did you do it? Why splash this blood upon our love? A useless thing to do! We might have—we might have——" He broke down and sobbed. And then: "God knows the old man never did me any harm," he said. "And she'd accuse the thief, too!" he cried a moment later, with a kind of wondering horror.

"Listen, Charles," she said, and moved towards him; and yet with a sidelong glance she still took heed of me. "Listen, and understand me. We must act quickly—but after it happened it was necessary that I should see you before we could act. This man came to rob; here is his pistol, and in that satchel by the window are his tools, no doubt. He may tell what wild tale he will; but who will believe him? You go as you came; I give him up—and we—we wait awhile, and then the rest of life is ours."

I suppose that it is given to few men to hear their death plotted in their presence. But I had come to the pass by this time where it struck me as an impersonal thing. I listened; but somehow the full sense of what she said, as affecting me, did not then impinge upon my brain with waking force. I stood as if in a trance; I stood and looked on at those two contending personalities, that were concerned just now with the question of my life or

death, as if I were a spectator in a theater—as if it were someone else of whom they spoke.

"Go," she cried to Charles again, "and I will give him up."

"Katherine," he said, "and you would do this thing?"

"Why?" she retorted, "what is this man's life beside mine? His soul is dead! I tell you, Charles, that I have come through Hell alive to gain one ray of happiness! But go!—and leave the rest to me."

And she grasped the bell cord and pulled it. Pulled it again and again. The sound wandered crazily through what remote corridors I know not.

She made a step towards him. He leaped to his feet with an oath, with loathing in his eyes, shrank back from her, and held out a hand as if to ward off some unclean thing.

Bewilderment lined her face. She groped to understand. And then, as the full significance of his gesture came home to her, she winced and swayed as if from a blow; and the pistol dropped from her loosened grasp to the floor.

"You—you abandon me?" she said slowly. "You desert me, then? Love, Love, think how I have loved you that I did this thing! And is what I have suffered—what I have done—still to purchase—nothing?"

She pleaded for my death; but I hope that I

shall never again see on any human face the look of despair that was on hers. I pitied her!

Heavy feet on the stairway woke me from my trance. Unregarded of them both I grasped my pistol from the floor and sprang for the window. A door opened somewhere above, and a voice asked:

"You rang, Ma'am?"

From without the window I looked back into the room. She stood with outstretched hands—hands that reached upward from the pit of torment, my fancy told me—and pleaded for a little love. "In all this world is there no little ray of love for me?"—it was so my imagination rather than my hearing translated the slight movement of her lips. And while she and the man called Charles stood thus at gaze with one another, the servant spoke again from the stairway.

"You rang?" he asked.

She slowly straightened. She steadied herself. And with her eyes still fixed upon those of Charles she cried:

"Yes, yes, I rang, Jones! Your master is—dead. Your master's murdered! And there, there," and she stabbed an accusing finger at her erstwhile lover, "there is the man who murdered him!"

And then I turned from the window and ran from that house; and as I ran I saw the Dawn, like a wild, fair woman, walk up the eastern sky with blood-stained feet.

XIII.—Words and Thoughts

XIII.—Words and Thoughts

[A Play in One Act]

Characters:

Cousin Fanny Hemlock
John Speaker
Mary Speaker
John Thinker
Mary Thinker
Maid

Period, the present. Place, any American city.

The Scene *represents two drawing rooms, exact duplicates, furnished alike to the smallest detail. Either room might be the reflection of the other in a mirror. Each occupies half of the stage. The division line between them is indicated, towards the back of the stage, by two pianos, which sit back to back at the center of the back drop. This division is carried by the pianos a quarter or a third of the way towards the footlights. The division is further suggested, towards the front of the stage, by a couple of settees or couches, which also sit back to back.*

JOHN SPEAKER *and* MARY SPEAKER *remain all the time in the room at the right of the stage. They are not aware of* JOHN THINKER *and* MARY THINKER, *who are, throughout the play, in the room at the left. The* THINKERS, *however, are aware of the* SPEAKERS.

In make-up, looks, dress, etc., the two JOHNS *are precisely alike. The same is true of* MARY SPEAKER *and* MARY THINKER. *The* JOHNS *are conventional-looking, prosperous Americans of from 38 to 40 years of age. The two* MARYS *are a few years younger.*

COUSIN FANNY HEMLOCK *is a dried-up, querulous old woman of seventy.*

The Curtain, on rising, discovers the two JOHNS *and the two* MARYS. *It is between 7 and 8 in the evening; they are all in evening dress, and are preparing to go out, putting on their gloves, etc., etc.*

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Picking up overcoat.*]

Are you ready, Mary dear?

MARY SPEAKER

[*Holding out a gloved hand.*]

Quite, John dear. Button this for me, won't you, love?

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Busy with glove.*]

It's been nearly a year, hasn't it, since we've been out together of an evening? I'm afraid Cou-

sin Fanny is terribly trying on you at times, Mary.

MARY SPEAKER

You know, John, I don't consider her a trial. I *love* Cousin Fanny.

JOHN THINKER

[*Busy with* MARY THINKER'S *glove.*]

The old cat's letting us off to-night, for a wonder, Mary. She's a horrible affliction!

MARY THINKER

[*Passionately.*]

Affliction is no word. She makes my life a living hell! I hate her!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Helping* MARY SPEAKER *on with coat, which action is simultaneously imitated by* JOHN *and* MARY THINKER.]

Well, we must bear with her gently, Mary. I am afraid poor Cousin Fanny will not be with us many more years.

JOHN THINKER

[*To* MARY THINKER.]

One comfort is she'll die before long!

MARY SPEAKER

[*To* JOHN SPEAKER.]

Oh, John, you don't think Cousin Fanny's going to die, do you?

MARY THINKER

[*To* JOHN THINKER.]

Don't fool yourself about her dying soon, John. There's no such luck!

[*Enter* MAID *through door in right back to* JOHN *and* MARY SPEAKER, *who look up.* JOHN *and* MARY THINKER *also notice entrance of* MAID *and listen.*]

MAID

[*To* MARY SPEAKER.]

Miss Hemlock sent me to inquire whether you were going out to-night.

MARY THINKER

[*To* JOHN THINKER, *quickly.*]

The old cat's up to something!

MARY SPEAKER

[*To* MAID.]

Yes. We were just starting. Does Miss Hemlock want anything? I will go to her if she wishes to speak with me.

MAID

She said, in case you were going out, that I was to tell you *not* to do so.

MARY SPEAKER

Not to do so?

MAID

Yes, ma'am; that's what she said. She said in case you were getting ready to go out, you were to change your plans and stop at home.

JOHN SPEAKER

[*To* MAID.]

Not to do so? But, surely, there must be some mistake!

[MAID *shakes her head slowly, deliberately, looking fixedly at* JOHN SPEAKER; *and while she is doing so* JOHN THINKER *says to* MARY THINKER:]

JOHN THINKER

Some malicious idea is working in her head to-night!

MAID

[*To* JOHN SPEAKER.]

No, sir, no mistake. She said very plainly and distinctly that you were not to go out to-night.

[MAID *bows and exits.*]

JOHN SPEAKER

Cousin Fanny is not so well to-night, I'm afraid, dear, or she would certainly have put her request in some other way.

MARY SPEAKER

If I didn't love Cousin Fanny, John, I would be tempted to believe that she deliberately tries at times to annoy us.

JOHN SPEAKER

Cousin Fanny is old, and we must remember that she is very fond of us. We will have to bear with her.

[JOHN SPEAKER *takes his top coat and his wife's coat, and lays them on a chair, while* JOHN THINKER, *who has been frowning and brooding, flings himself into chair and says to* MARY THINKER:]

JOHN THINKER

For cold-blooded, devilish nerve in a man's own house, Cousin Fanny certainly takes the cake, Mary!

MARY THINKER

She gets more spiteful every day. She knows her power, and the more childish she gets the more delight she takes in playing tyrant.

JOHN THINKER

Cheer up, it isn't forever! If she doesn't change her will before she dies, it means fifteen thousand dollars a year. That's worth a little trouble!

MARY THINKER

You're away at your office all day. I'm here at home with her. It is I who catch all the trouble!

JOHN THINKER

Well, after all, she's more nearly related to you, Mary, than she is to me.

MARY THINKER

She's my mother's third cousin, if you call *that* near!

JOHN THINKER

Well, then, she's my father's fifth cousin, if you call *that* near!

MARY SPEAKER

What were you thinking of, John, dear?

JOHN SPEAKER

Nothing . . . nothing, Mary . . . except that

Cousin Fanny is a poor, lonely old soul, after all.

MARY SPEAKER

Poor, lonely old woman, indeed—it's odd, isn't it, that she is related to both you and me, John?

JOHN SPEAKER

She's closer to *you* than to me, Mary.

MARY SPEAKER

You couldn't call a fourth or fifth cousin very near, John.

JOHN SPEAKER

It almost seems as if you were trying to deny the blood tie, Mary!

MARY SPEAKER

No, John, dear, blood is thicker than water.

JOHN SPEAKER

Thicker than water!

JOHN THINKER

Relations are the most unpleasant persons on earth. I hate cousins.

MARY THINKER

Especially cousins who are also cousins-in-law!

JOHN SPEAKER

But even if she were only *my* relation, Mary, and not related to *you* at all, I know enough of your sweet nature to know that she would always be welcome in our home in spite of her little idiosyncrasies.

[*Enter* COUSIN FANNY, *to* JOHN *and* MARY SPEAKER, *through door right back. She coughs as she steps forward, leaning on a*

cane, and puts her hand to her chest, stopping. Then as she comes forward, she stumbles. JOHN *and* MARY SPEAKER *leap forward, put their arms behind her, and, supporting and leading her, conduct her tenderly down stage to chair at center of room they are in.* JOHN *and* MARY THINKER, *near together at table in their room, lean forward eagerly and watch this entrance, and when the old woman stumbles,* JOHN THINKER *says to* MARY THINKER, *nudging her:*]

JOHN THINKER

You see?

MARY THINKER

See what?

JOHN THINKER

She totters!

MARY THINKER

She stumbled.

JOHN THINKER

She's getting weaker.

[MARY SPEAKER *tenderly kisses* COUSIN FANNY, *as* MARY THINKER *says:*]

MARY THINKER

Weaker! She'll live to be a hundred and ten!

JOHN THINKER

Not she!

MARY THINKER

The mean kind always do!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Tenderly, to* COUSIN FANNY, *arranging cushion behind her.*]

Can't I get you a wrap, Cousin Fanny?

MARY SPEAKER

Don't you feel a draught, Cousin Fanny?

MARY THINKER

[*Bitterly, frowning at other group.*]

No draught will ever harm *her!*

COUSIN FANNY

[*To* JOHN SPEAKER, *sneeringly; petulantly.*]

You're mighty anxious about a *wrap,* John! But you were thinking of going out and leaving me practically alone in the house.

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Deprecatingly.*]

But, Cousin Fanny——

COUSIN FANNY

[*Interrupting.*]

Don't deny it! Don't take the trouble to deny it! Don't lie about it! You can't lie to me! Don't I see your evening clothes? And Mary, too! Both of you were going out—*both* of you!

MARY SPEAKER

Cousin Fanny, we gave it up when we learned that you wanted us to stop at home with you. Didn't we, John?

COUSIN FANNY

[*Querulously, childishly, shrilly.*]

Don't deny it, Mary, don't deny it! Don't excuse

yourself! I can see you were going out! I can see your evening clothes!

MARY SPEAKER

We'll go and change to something else, won't we, John?

[*She is going, as she speaks, but* COUSIN FANNY *cries out:*]

COUSIN FANNY

Stop!

[MARY SPEAKER *stops, and* COUSIN FANNY *continues:*]

Don't take them off. I don't want you to take them off. What do you want to take them off for? Are they too good for *me* to see? Are they too grand for me to look at? Ain't I as good as any one you'd find if you went out? Heh?

MARY SPEAKER

Cousin Fanny, I didn't mean that. I meant——

COUSIN FANNY

[*Interrupting.*]

I know what you meant! Don't tell me what you meant, Mary. You meant to slip out and leave me here alone, both of you. It's lucky I caught you in time. It's lucky I have money! It's lucky I don't have to put up with the treatment most old folks get. I'd starve, if I were poor! I'd die of hunger and neglect!

[*She begins to cry, and* MARY SPEAKER *says:*]

MARY SPEAKER

No, no, no, Cousin Fanny!

[MARY SPEAKER *soothes her, in pantomime, and pets her, trying to take her hands away from her face,* COUSIN FANNY *resisting, like a spoiled and spiteful child.* JOHN SPEAKER, *behind* COUSIN FANNY *and his wife, walks up and down, with his eyes on them, running his hand nervously and excitedly through his hair. While this pantomime goes on,* JOHN *and* MARY THINKER *are watching and saying:*]

JOHN THINKER

This is to be one of Cousin Fanny's pleasant evenings!

MARY THINKER

This happens a dozen times a day.

JOHN THINKER

She's not really crying.

MARY THINKER

Pretence! She works it up to be unpleasant.

JOHN THINKER

The old she-devil!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Taking* COUSIN FANNY'S *hand.*]

You know, Cousin Fanny, that we try to do our duty by you.

COUSIN FANNY

[*Flinging his hand off.*]

You try to do your duty by my money! I know!

I see! You talk of love and duty, but it's my money you want! But I may fool you—I may fool you yet. It's not too late to change my will. It's not too late to leave it all to charity!

[*She speaks these lines with a cunning leer, and* JOHN THINKER, *nudging* MARY THINKER *and pointing to her, says:*]

JOHN THINKER

The old cat is capable of it, too!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*To* COUSIN FANNY.]

If you should leave your money to charity, Cousin Fanny, you would find it made no difference with us. You know blood is thicker than water, Cousin Fanny!

COUSIN FANNY

[*Shrewdly, maliciously.*]

So is sticky flypaper!

JOHN SPEAKER

Come, come, you don't doubt the genuineness of our affection, do you, Cousin Fanny? You've known me from my boyhood, Cousin Fanny, and you've lived with us for ten years. You ought to know us by this time! You ought to know us in ten years!

MARY THINKER

Ten years of torture!

JOHN THINKER

It *can't* last much longer!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Who has taken her hand again, and has been patting it as a continuation of his last speech, and looking at her fondly.*]

You trust us, don't you, Cousin Fanny? You really are sure of our affection, aren't you?

COUSIN FANNY

[*To* JOHN SPEAKER. *She shows that she really is willing to be convinced; she searches their faces wistfully; she is pathetically eager.*]

John, John, you really *do* care for me, don't you?

[*She takes a hand of each.*]

It isn't *all* on account of my money, is it? If you knew I hadn't a cent, you'd still be good to me, wouldn't you?

JOHN SPEAKER AND MARY SPEAKER

[*Together.*]

Yes, yes, Cousin Fanny!

COUSIN FANNY

If I lost it all; if I told you I'd lost it all, you'd be just the same, wouldn't you?

[JOHN SPEAKER *and* MARY SPEAKER *exchange glances over her head, and* JOHN SPEAKER *drops her hand, while* JOHN THINKER *grabs* MARY THINKER *excitedly by the arm and says quickly:*]

JOHN THINKER

My God, you don't suppose she's really *lost* it, do you?

MARY THINKER

No! This is just one of her cunning spells now. She can be as crafty as a witch.

COUSIN FANNY

If I hadn't a cent you'd still care for me, wouldn't you, Mary?

MARY SPEAKER

Why, Cousin Fanny, you know I would!

COUSIN FANNY

But I'm hard on you at times. I'm unjust. I don't mean to be spiteful, but I *am* spiteful. When we get old we get suspicious of people. We get suspicious of everybody. And suspicion makes us spiteful and unjust. I know I'm not easy to live with, Mary.

MARY SPEAKER

[*Kissing* COUSIN FANNY.]

You get such strange notions, Cousin Fanny!

JOHN THINKER

And such true ones, Cousin Fanny!

COUSIN FANNY

Tell me the truth, Mary. You find me a trial, Mary. You and John find me a trial!

MARY SPEAKER AND JOHN SPEAKER

[*Together.*]

Never, Cousin Fanny!

MARY THINKER AND JOHN THINKER

[*Together.*]

Always, Cousin Fanny!

COUSIN FANNY

And that is the truth?

JOHN SPEAKER, JOHN THINKER, MARY SPEAKER AND MARY THINKER

[*All together.*]

And that is the truth, Cousin Fanny!

COUSIN FANNY

You don't know how suspicious one gets!

MARY SPEAKER

[*Petting her.*]

But suspicion never stays long in your good heart, Cousin Fanny. There's no room for it there, I know. But don't you think you'd better go to bed now? Let me call the maid.

COUSIN FANNY

[*Rousing up in chair; suspicion and meanness all awake again.*]

To bed? Why to bed? Why do you want to pack me off to bed? I know! I know why! You want me to go to bed so you two can talk about me. So you can talk me over! So you can speculate on how long I will live. I know you! I know what you talk about when I'm not around! I know what you've been waiting and hoping for the last ten years!

[*Begins to cry.*]

Well, you won't have long to wait now. The time's almost come! I feel it's almost here. You'll get the money soon enough!

MARY SPEAKER

[*Soothing her.*]

There, there, Cousin Fanny, don't go on like this!

You know it isn't true—you know you'll live ten years yet!

[JOHN SPEAKER *runs his hands through his hair and looks silently at* MARY SPEAKER, *and* JOHN THINKER, *with the same gesture, says to* MARY THINKER:]

JOHN THINKER

If I thought she'd live ten years yet——!

[*Pauses.*]

MARY THINKER

Well, if you thought she'd live ten years yet——?

JOHN THINKER

[*With a gesture of despair.*]

My God—ten years like the last ten years! Ten years! Talk about earning money! If it hasn't been earned ten times over!

MARY THINKER

[*Fiercely.*]

You see it mornings and evenings. I have it all day long, and every day. I've had it for ten years. I go nowhere, I see no one. I have no pleasures. I have no friends; I've lost my friends. I'm losing my youth. I'm losing my looks. I'm losing my very soul. I'm shedding my life's blood drop by drop to keep that querulous fool alive—just merely alive! I'm tired of it! I'm sick of it! I'm desperate! I'm dying from her, I tell you!

MARY SPEAKER

[*Still soothing* COUSIN FANNY, *but speaking*

with one hand nervously clutching her own head as she does so.]

Come, come, Cousin Fanny—you'd better go to bed now!

COUSIN FANNY

I won't go to bed yet! I want my medicine. It's time for my medicine now. I won't go to bed till I've had my sleeping tablets.

JOHN SPEAKER

Where are they, Cousin Fanny?

COUSIN FANNY

On top of the bookcase there. The small phial.

[JOHN SPEAKER *goes to the bookcase and begins to rummage for phial, while* JOHN THINKER *says, meditatively:*]

JOHN THINKER

I suppose if one ever gave her the wrong medicine by mistake it would be called by some ugly name!

MARY THINKER

People like her never get the wrong medicine given to them, and never take it by mistake themselves.

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Finding bottle; examining it.*]

See here, Cousin Fanny, didn't you have one of these about an hour ago? Didn't I see you take one of them right after dinner?

COUSIN FANNY

[*Peevishly.*]

I don't know. I don't remember. I want one

now, anyhow. My nerves are on the jump. You have got all my nerves on the jump. I'll take one, and nap here in the chair.

JOHN SPEAKER

[*To* MARY SPEAKER.]

She took one about an hour ago. I don't think it's quite right to let her have another so soon. They have a powerful depressing effect on the heart.

MARY SPEAKER

Let me see which ones they are.

[JOHN SPEAKER *holds the bottle out towards* MARY SPEAKER, *in front of* COUSIN FANNY. COUSIN FANNY *snatches it with a sudden motion, and laughs childishly.* JOHN SPEAKER *and* MARY SPEAKER *look at each other inquiringly over her head.*]

JOHN SPEAKER

She really shouldn't have another one now, I'm afraid, dear. It might be pretty serious.

[*To* COUSIN FANNY.]

You *did* take one right after dinner, didn't you, Cousin Fanny?

COUSIN FANNY

[*Hugging bottle to her very excitedly.*]

No! No! I tell you I didn't! I *will* take one! You don't want me to get to sleep! You don't want me to get any rest! You want me to die!

JOHN THINKER

I *know* that she *did* have one.

MARY SPEAKER

[*To* JOHN SPEAKER.]

What can you do, dear?

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Taking hold of* COUSIN FANNY'S *hands, and trying to take phial gently.*]

See here, Cousin Fanny, you must be reasonable . . . you mustn't be stubborn about this. You can't have another tablet now. It's dangerous. It might even kill you!

JOHN THINKER

It *would* kill her as certainly as she sits there.

JOHN SPEAKER

Come, come, Cousin Fanny . . . it might be dangerous.

MARY SPEAKER

John, don't struggle with her! Don't you know if you struggle with her it is likely to prove fatal? The doctor says the *least* strain will prove fatal.

COUSIN FANNY

[*Whimpering and struggling.*]

Let me have it! Let me alone! Let go of my hands! You want to kill me! You want me to die so you can get my money!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Releasing her.*]

No! No! No! Cousin Fanny . . . Come, be reasonable!

[*He reaches for her hands again, and she*

grabs his hand and bites it. He draws back and says:]

Damn!

[*Nurses his hand.*]

MARY SPEAKER

Did she bite you?

JOHN SPEAKER

Yes.

[*Nurses his hand, and* MARY SPEAKER *examines it, while* COUSIN FANNY *pulls cork from phial with teeth, and* JOHN THINKER *says:*]

JOHN THINKER

The old viper has teeth yet!

MARY THINKER

She is a cat . . . she is a she-devil . . . she is a witch . . . she has a bad heart. . . .

JOHN SPEAKER

[*To* MARY SPEAKER, *pointing to* COUSIN FANNY, *who is shaking tablet out of bottle; she drops one and gropes for it, and shakes another more carefully, with air of childish triumph.*]

Mary, what *can* I do? She *will* have it! And if I struggle with her it will kill her! She is too weak to struggle! It will kill her to struggle! And if I let her take the tablet it may do her harm!

MARY SPEAKER

Perhaps the tablet won't do her any harm, John.

JOHN THINKER

It will kill her as surely as she sits there. I know it will and *you* know it will.

JOHN SPEAKER

Maybe it won't hurt her, Mary . . . but we can never tell. . . . I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid it really *might* harm her. . . .

COUSIN FANNY

[*Putting tablet into her mouth.*]

There! I'm going to sleep, now. . . . I'm going to sleep in spite of you. You hate me—both of you hate me—but you can't prevent me going to sleep!

MARY SPEAKER

She's taken it, John. Do you suppose she really *did* have one before?

JOHN SPEAKER

[*To* COUSIN FANNY.]

Cousin Fanny, you *didn't* have one before, did you?

COUSIN FANNY

[*She has closed her eyes; she opens them and rocks back and forth, laughing foolishly.*]

Yes!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Taking out handkerchief; mopping forehead.*]

I don't believe she did. She says she did, but she doesn't know.

COUSIN FANNY

[*Rocking and laughing sillily.*]

Yes, I did! You know I did!

JOHN SPEAKER

She doesn't know. . . . She doesn't know whether she did or not. . . . She hasn't really been right in her mind for a long time. I don't think she had one before.

[*As he speaks* COUSIN FANNY *ceases rocking and leans back in her chair, closing her eyes. From this time on the two* JOHNS *and the two* MARYS *stare at her intently, never taking their eyes off of her while they speak.*]

JOHN THINKER

She *did* have one before.

MARY THINKER

I *know* she did.

JOHN THINKER

Will she die? Will I see her die? I should hate to see her die!

JOHN SPEAKER

She *would* have that tablet . . . she WOULD have it. If I had taken it away from her by force it would have killed her; the struggle would have killed her.

JOHN THINKER

Will I see her die? Will she die?

JOHN SPEAKER

I let her have it to save her life . . . it was to save her life that I quit struggling with her.

JOHN THINKER

If she dies . . . but *will* she die?

MARY THINKER

She will die!

COUSIN FANNY

[*Rousing from her lethargy slightly; opening her eyes.*]

John . . . Mary. . . . You really love me, don't you? Don't you? You really . . . really . . .

[*Sinks back, with head slightly on one side and eyes closed again; does not move after this.*]

MARY SPEAKER

[*They all speak with lowered voices now.*]

She is asleep. She really needed the tablet. It was a mercy she got it. She was nervous and overwrought, and it has put her to sleep.

JOHN SPEAKER

Yes, it was a mercy she got it. She was nervous and overwrought, and it has put her to sleep. . . . And you know, Mary, she *would* have t . . . if I had *struggled* with her, she would have *died!* A struggle would have killed her.

JOHN THINKER

And now she will die because there was no struggle.

MARY THINKER

She will die.

JOHN SPEAKER

Is she breathing quite naturally, Mary?

MARY SPEAKER

Quite. Quite naturally.

MARY THINKER

Death is quite natural.

JOHN THINKER

And she is dying.

JOHN SPEAKER

Well, if she had struggled and died . . . if she had died through any fault of mine . . . I would always have reproached myself. . . .

MARY SPEAKER

You have nothing to reproach yourself for. You need never reproach yourself with regard to her. . . .

JOHN THINKER

She was old. She was very old. She will be better dead.

MARY THINKER

She is not quite dead.

JOHN SPEAKER

I don't like the way she is breathing. . . . She is scarcely breathing. . . . She doesn't seem to be breathing at all!

MARY SPEAKER

Old people breathe very quietly.

MARY THINKER

Old people die very quietly.

JOHN THINKER

And she is dying.

MARY THINKER

She is dead!

JOHN THINKER

Mary . . . Mary . . . is she breathing at all?

MARY SPEAKER

Call the maid. . . . Send for the doctor. . . . Call the maid!

JOHN THINKER

It is too late for any doctor.

MARY THINKER

Too late!

JOHN SPEAKER

Mary, Mary. . . . My God . . . she can't be *dead!*

MARY SPEAKER

[*Bending above her.*]

John, dear . . . try to bear it bravely . . . but . . . but I'm afraid she is. . . . Poor Cousin Fanny has left us!

JOHN SPEAKER

[*Rapidly.*]

Poor Cousin Fanny. . . . Poor Cousin Fanny. . . . Poor Cousin Fanny. . . .

JOHN THINKER

Fifteen thousand a year . . . fifteen thousand a year. . . . Why do I think of that? . . . But I can't help it. . . . I can't help thinking of it. . . .

MARY SPEAKER

I'll go get the maid.

[*Going.*]

JOHN SPEAKER

Stop. . . . Wait, Mary. . . . Don't call her yet . . . get her presently. . . . I don't want to be alone just now. . . . I'm in a kind of fog. . . .

[*Lights go out as he says this; he continues in the darkness.*]

I'm all in the dark.

[*Lights on again.*]

[*In the interim, which is very short,* COUSIN FANNY *has gone over to the room on the left in which are* JOHN *and* MARY THINKER, *and sits in chair corresponding to one which she has just left.*

She is silent and motionless, but her head is lifted; her eyes are open; she is alive again. When lights go on again, JOHN *and* MARY SPEAKER *still stand before chair she has left as if she were in it; it is apparent that they believe themselves to be still looking at the old woman.*]

MARY SPEAKER

Nonsense . . . all in the dark? . . . What do you mean by all in the dark?

JOHN SPEAKER

Nothing . . . nothing now. It has passed. . . .

[*Pointing to chair where* COUSIN FANNY *was.*] She died with a smile on her face!

JOHN THINKER

But she isn't there. . . . Cousin Fanny isn't there. . . . She's here. . . . She's over here with us . . . over here with *US!*

MARY THINKER

Here with us . . . over here, forever, now.

MARY SPEAKER

[*Holding* JOHN SPEAKER'S *hand and gazing at vacant chair.*]

How beautiful she looks! She is at rest, now! She is better off so. Better dead. She is better at peace!

JOHN THINKER

[*Violently; starting towards other room.*]

My God. I'm going to stop it . . . stop it . . . stop that lying . . . stop it at any cost. . . . I'm going to stop that pretending . . . that damned pretending. . . .

MARY THINKER

[*Quickly getting in front of him; holding him back.*]

What are you going to do?

JOHN THINKER

Stop it, I tell you. . . . Tell the truth . . . stop that pretense. . . .

[*Moves towards the other room. As he does so,* MARY SPEAKER *and* JOHN SPEAKER, *for the first time become aware of* JOHN *and* MARY THINKER, *and shrink back in terror and alarm, clinging together, confused, convicted, abject, retreating,*

powerless; COUSIN FANNY *leaps in front of* JOHN THINKER *at same instant, and bars him back, saying:*]

COUSIN FANNY

Stop!

JOHN THINKER

Why? I *will* stop this pretense . . . Why not?

COUSIN FANNY

[*All four of the others lean forward and hang eagerly upon her words.*]

You must not. It can't be done. It is the foundation upon which your society rests. It is necessary . . . *over there!*

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